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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

THE NEW ENGLAND BACKGROUND IN THE POETRY

OF

ROBERT FROST

by

Clara Bartlett Shaw

(B.S., Boston University, C.L.A., 1922)

submitted in partial fulfilment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1933

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## THE NEW ENGLAND BACKGROUND IN THE

### POETRY OF ROBERT FROST

#### INTRODUCTION

##### Passing of New England Country Life

Robert Frost is unquestionably the  
greatest present-day poet of New Eng-

land. His work, more than that of any other American poet of this generation, embodies the country life of this section ---its sights and sounds, its natural features, and its people. This statement must not be taken to imply, however, that there is nothing but a narrow provincialism in Frost's poetry. A recent writer<sup>1</sup> speaks of two critics of Frost one of whom "contended that his poetry could make no claim to great and lasting art because of its exceedingly provincial character, unintelligible to readers unfamiliar to the section."

The writer himself does not hold with this opinion, but says that he cannot believe "that a reader a thousand miles away and a hundred years hence would fail of Frost's meaning in the most colloquial of his poems.

Frost is a poet of a restricted area and people, but any view of his work which sees this only would exclude much that is moving and beautiful. He has poems of beautiful phrasing whose feeling has no reference to

1 David Morton....Poet of the New England Hills  
Outlook, December 19, 1923



THE NEW ENGLAND BACKGROUND IN THE

POETRY OF ROBERT FROST

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Frost is a poet of a restricted area and people, but any  
view of his work which sees this only would exclude  
much that is moving and beautiful. He has poems of  
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environment." But it is this peculiar New England flavor in much of Frost's work that has a special appeal to those readers who were themselves brought up in the country, and who love the former things which have passed or are passing away. No one, probably, would wish to return to the kerosene lamp with its ill-smelling wick and smoked chimney,-- at least not the women folk who had to take care of them,-- or walk two or three miles for the daily mail, or "catch" the pump with a dipper of water before quenching one's thirst; but the Spirit of Progress has much to answer for in its relentless march, and a certain wholesomeness and vigor, a simplicity and an integrity inherent in rural New England life are being lost in the pressure of urban civilization. Something that was fine in the life of the old days is retreating, like the magnificent trees which used to border our country roadsides, to more and more remote and inaccessible places. It is because so many of these rural scenes which men and women of the older generation today were accustomed to in their youth are passing, that they find a peculiar pleasure and poignancy in the reading of Robert Frost's poems of New England.

Need of Being  
Versed in Country  
Things

The title of one of these poems is The  
Need of Being Versed in Country Things,<sup>1</sup>

a line that might well stand as the theme of the introduction of this thesis, for, to the writer, one who is not



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in much of Frost's work that has a special appeal to those  
readers who were themselves brought up in the country, and  
who love the former things which have passed or are passing  
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household with its ill-smelling wick and smoky chimney,  
at least not the women folk who had to take care of them,  
or walk two or three miles for the daily mail, or "school"

the young with a slipper of water before quenching one's  
thirst; but the spirit of Frost's work has much to answer for  
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Head of School  
Vernon in County  
Head of School  
Vernon in County

a line that might stand as the theme of the letter-  
question of this issue, for, to the writer, one who is not

so versed has missed something very important in his life. Children who have only city images and concepts seem far more poorly equipped than those who have had some country experience. This need has recently been met in an amusing way in one of our crowded city school districts. A sedate cow and her calf were brought into the school yard, and there, in the presence of a large gathering of children, the cow was milked, the proponents of this exhibition thereby hoping to demonstrate to these little folk of the tenements the importance of milk in their diet, and first-hand knowledge of where it comes from.

Who would exchange, for all the advantages of city experiences, the memory of the first faint peep of the hylas in spring, the odor of the sweet pepper-bush from damp roadsides on summer evenings, the slow oxen wearing wooden frames on their feet when haying was to be done in the marshy ground of the Hocamoc meadows, picking strawberries warmed by the June sun, or waiting in hushed expectancy for the note of the wood thrush?

Only one versed in country lore could write of  
"the dry pump" that "flung up an awkward arm",<sup>1</sup> or of  
the barn that "opened with all one end"

For teams that came by the stony road  
To drum on the floor with scurrying hoofs  
And brush the mow with the summer load.<sup>2</sup>

1 The Need of Being Versed in Country Things-R. Frost

2 Ibid





Frost's poems are filled with images showing his close observation of everything about him, from the "highway where the slow wheel pours the sand",<sup>1</sup> to the "unpruned grapes..flung like lariats far up the birches out of reach of man";<sup>2</sup> and how the following lines call up a whole country scene in early spring!

...the snow may heap  
In long storms an undrifted four feet deep...  
It cannot check the peeper's silver croak;  
And I shall see the snow all go down hill  
In water of a slender April rill  
That flashes tail through last year's  
withered brake  
And dead weeds, like a disappearing snake.  
Nothing will be left white but here a birch,  
And there a clump of houses with a church.<sup>3</sup>

Contribution to  
Native Idiom

Another reason for a New Englander's interest in Frost's work, aside from the keen pleasure derived from the study of such scenes and people as he produces, is his use of our native idiom which seems to be in danger of being lost or at least perverted by the admixture of foreign elements in our population. These latter have not the traditions of speech nor the idioms common to our forefathers. Perhaps through Frost's use of the vernacular, these picturesque words or expressions will be kept alive a little longer, at least in literature. The bulkhead, the grind-stone and axe-helve, chores, 'cross lots, cider apple trees and

1 Into My Own...Collected Poems of Robert Frost  
2 New Hampshire " " " " "  
3 The Onset " " " " "



Prose's poems are filled with images showing his  
 close observation of everything about him, from the  
 "highway where the snow wheel pours the sand,"<sup>1</sup> to the  
 "unpainted grapes... turning like jarrids for up the ditches"  
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 up a whole country scene in early spring:

...the snow may keep  
 In long stores an undisturbed floor deep...  
 It cannot check the water's silver glow;  
 And I shall see the snow all so soon melt  
 In water of a slender April rill  
 That flashes half through last year's  
 withered twigs  
 And dead weeds, like a disappearing smoke.  
 Nothing will be left white but bare a dune,  
 And there a clump of hawthorn with a thorn.

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 speech nor the idiom common to our forefathers. Perhaps  
 through Frost's use of the vernacular, these picturesque  
 words or expressions will be kept alive a little longer,  
 as they are in literature. The ballad, the rhyme-system  
 and even the, choice, 'rural idiom, older apple trees and

1 Line 10, "Collected Poems of Robert Frost"  
 2 New Hampshire  
 3 The Waste

crops, hylas and cedar swamps, windfalls, stubble, cherry-bloom, butterfly weed, the runner tracks of a wood-sled, a jag of hay for the bay in the barn,--these are a few, only, of the homely, pungent, New England country expressions around which clings the flavor of the soil. Perhaps with the movement for return to the farms which seems to be gaining headway through the economic depression of the past few years, these words and many another native country idiom will be preserved.

Environment the Key  
to Country Types  
of Character

As a final reason for a study of Frost's poems for their interpretation of environment, is the contribution they make to an understanding of the nature and character of the country people about whom he writes. The poet has long dwelt among them, he has labored with his own hands to wrest a precarious living from the soil, as they have done, he has familiarity with the many types of occupations to which a New Englander of rural districts must be able to turn his hand, and he writes of them all without either sentimentality, on the one hand, or brutality on the other. So truly has he drawn these people that we get a just and sympathetic perception of the qualities engendered by their isolated living conditions and their struggles to maintain themselves



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in their lonely and laborious existence. Miss Lowell says, "If one believed in supernatural intervention, one would say that Mr. Frost was dedicated from his cradle to be the poet of latter-day New England, and of that alone."<sup>1</sup> She goes on to say that North of Boston which Frost has called "A Book of People" is a very sad book on account of the decadent conditions which he describes. The opening up of the West with its fertile farming lands had seriously affected the industry in New England; young men in great numbers had abandoned the bleak farms of our countryside for the greater opportunities thus afforded. She thinks that only the remnants of a feeble stock are left here, often morbid, sometimes actually insane; and points out that, in spite of the author's sympathetic treatment, "the book reveals a disease which is slowly eating into the vitals of our New England life, at least in its rural communities."<sup>2</sup> She refers to "the twisted and tortured lives" of Frost's characters in North of Boston as having been reproduced "with a vividness which is extraordinary," but adds that he "does not deal with the changed population who are taking up the deserted farms, nor is Mr. Frost's the kindly New England of Whittier, nor the humorous and sensible one of Lowell; it is a latter-day New England, where a civilization is

1 Tendencies in Modern American Poetry-Amy Lowell

2 Ibid



in their family and literary experience. Miss Lowell says, "It was believed in superstitious England, one would say that Mr. Frost was detached from the people to be the poet of latter-day New England, and of that

class." She goes on to say that North of Boston

which Frost has called "A Book of People" is a very good book on account of the honest recognition which he describes. The opening up of the West with its terrible

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with the changed population who are taking up the deserted farms, nor is Mr. Frost's the highly New England of Whittier, nor the humorous and realistic one of Lowell; it

is a latter-day New England, where a civilization is

decaying to give place to another and very different one...His people are left-overs of the old stock, morbid, pursued by phantoms, slowly sinking to insanity...the book is an epitome of a decaying New England".<sup>1</sup>

If this criticism is true, then it seems to me that Frost has made a very definite contribution to the literature of this locality in a way that no other author has done; he has crystallized in unforgettable verse and vividly etched pictures a people who are passing, who are a link between the great days that have been in early New England, and a time which seems to be approaching when we shall watch with interest the effect that good roads, improved farming methods, the radio, the automobile, and the latest applications of science have upon these heretofore isolated communities and people.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ROBERT FROST

##### Paradoxical Personality and Career

A recent writer on Robert Frost says, "There is something paradoxical about all poets. There is more than the ordinary amount of paradox in the personality and career of Robert Frost. He is essentially a poet of New England, in a day when you wouldn't expect New England to nourish poets, and he

<sup>1</sup> Tendencies in Modern American Poetry-Amy Lowell



...to give place to another and very different  
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He is essentially a poet of New England, in a day when  
you wouldn't expect New England to contain poets, and he

was born in San Francisco. He is essentially a Yankee, but his name is Robert Lee. He is essentially American but his first public recognition came to him in England after thirty years without honor in his own country. He is a part of the literary world and yet he lives in a little village in Vermont, remote from all but echoes of it. He has never lifted a hand to get a reputation for himself and yet he is immensely pleased with the reputation he has got. He doesn't believe in literary prizes, yet he has won the Pulitzer award for poetry twice. He is essentially a farmer, yet he never does any real farm work--prefers, rather, to sit on a fence or a stone and see it done. Although the book of poems which made him famous, North of Boston, is considered by most lay readers to be pretty rough and knotty verse, Frost has perhaps the keenest metrical ear of any American poet."<sup>1</sup>

Personal Appearance

I have before me two copies of photographs of the head of Robert Frost by Doris Ulmann, one the frontispiece of his Collected Poems, the other prefacing a biography of Frost by Sidney Cox. These photographs give us an impression of a rugged head, large and well developed, covered with a shock of somewhat disordered hair. The eyes are beautiful in shape, and

1 Profiles by Raymond Holden in The New Yorker,  
June 6, 1931



was born in San Francisco. He is essentially a Yankee,  
but his name is Robert Lee. He is essentially American  
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large and well developed, covered with a shock of some-  
what disordered hair. The eyes are beautiful in shape, and

deep-set under heavy brows. The nose is large, the lips full, the chin strong. The face does not strike one as that of a poet; it is sensible and shrewd, with a rather sweet expression about the mouth. Although fine and strong, there seems to be nothing aesthetic about it. The eyes, however, betray something of the whimsicality and of the mysticism which we find in his work.

Family Background      Born in San Francisco, California, March 26, 1875, Robert Frost was a descendant of New England forbears through many generations. His father, William Frost, had left Amherst to go out West. He married Isabelle Moody, a woman of Scotch descent. His sympathy with the South resulted in his giving his son the name of Robert Lee. William Frost was a teacher, a politician, and a newspaper editor. After his death, his wife returned East with her children, supporting them by teaching. Robert's grandfather was a mill man of some means, able to give them a home.

Education and Employment      The poet received a good education, but he did not enjoy the restraint of college, and left Dartmouth in 1892. For a time he was employed in a Lawrence mill. He was at various times teacher, shoe-maker, and newspaper editor. He had always desired freedom to write poetry, and had sent some poems



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to the magazines; but as a general thing, editors were not impressed by his "strange, soil-flavored"<sup>1</sup> verse.

It is amusing to learn that The Atlantic Monthly rejected poems which afterwards appeared in North of Boston with the statement: "We regret that the Atlantic has no place for your vigorous verse."<sup>2</sup> Later, when the above-

mentioned book had brought the poet a measure of fame, "the editor of the Atlantic wrote Frost asking to have some of his work. Frost sent him some of the very things which had previously been rejected and they duly appeared in the Atlantic".<sup>3</sup> In 1900 the poet became a farmer at Derry, New Hampshire, and for a time held a position at Pinkerton Academy here; but he was continually struggling to make a living for himself and family--he had a wife and four children--and in 1912 he sold his farm and sailed with his family for Europe.

Experience  
in England

In England he settled in a suburban town where he met several young English poets whose friendship he enjoyed, and here he continued to write. In 1913 David Nutt, the English publisher brought out Frost's first book, A Boy's Will which was favorably received. In 1914 a second volume, North of Boston was also brought out by the same publisher in England.

1 Modern American Poetry-Luis Untermeyer p.253

2 Profiles-Raymond Holden in The New Yorker, June 6, 1931

3 Ibid



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Later Life  
in America

In March 1915 Frost came back to America, and settled outside Franconia, New Hampshire. His book, North of Boston, had been re-printed in the United States, and the writer who had left this country unknown, returned to find that he was famous. In 1916, Mountain Interval appeared; in 1923, New Hampshire; in 1928, West-Running Brook; and in 1930, Collected Poems,--the second and the last of these being awarded the Pulitzer Prize of the year.

At different times the poet has been connected with several colleges as professor, but he does not enjoy teaching. Of his professorship at Amherst one biographer writes, "he is more like an unusually living ordinary man than like a professor. He refuses to ask questions that he himself can answer...He would like his students to seek what he wants most,--'the freedom of my materials'."<sup>1</sup> Another critic writes of him, "He remains a country-dweller, a poet, with six honorary degrees from Master of Arts to Doctor of Letters, degrees which have been awarded him in recognition of his services as a poet and a teacher."<sup>2</sup> Another recent writer refers to the poet's persistent desire "to live relaxed and unhurried, not in indolence--for he likes to work with his hands--and not in solitude for he is most

1 Robert Frost by Sidney Cox

2 Profiles by Raymond Holden in The New Yorker



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between two islands: Arts to Foster of Letters, degrees  
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refers to the poet's persistent desire "to live relaxed  
and untroubled, not in idleness--for he likes to work  
with his hands--and not in solitude for he is most

companionable--but in such quiet circumstances that, as he has said, he can lean against life until it stings him into utterance...Of all that life has to give he finds nothing to rival sympathetic companionship--between neighbors, friends, parents and children, husbands and wives."<sup>1</sup> Of the poet's personal traits Raymond Holden writes, "Frost likes to sit up late and talk....always brilliantly and soundly. He still likes to walk, preferably in the mountains. He likes sea chanteys, sports, the theatre (when he visits the city), and he likes to talk and read about scientific achievements and exploration....He has become one of the really important figures in American literature."<sup>2</sup>

#### NEW ENGLAND BACKGROUND OF HIS POEMS

##### IN NATURE

Frost's poems, whether narrative or lyric, are chiefly set against the background of nature in his own well-loved New Hampshire. This background, like a rich tapestry, is at times bright and colorful with its pattern of sunny meadows, singing birds, wild-flowers, or rugged and drab in its harsher aspects of boulder-crowned mountain or rotting, blackened stumps of waste

1 Some Contemporary Americans by Percy H. Boynton

2 Profiles by Raymond Holden in The New Yorker

June 6, 1931



responsibility--but in such quiet circumstances that  
 as he has said, he can leave against life until it strikes  
 his life elsewhere... "Of all that life has to give he  
 finds nothing to rival systematic compassion--between  
 neighbors, friends, parents and children, husbands and  
 wives." <sup>1</sup> Of the poet's personal traits Raymond Holden  
 writes, "Trost likes to sit up late and talk.... always  
 brightly and soundly. He still likes to walk, pre-  
 ferably in the mountains. He likes sea chanteys, sports,  
 the theatre (when he visits the city), and he likes to  
 talk and read about scientific achievements and experi-  
 ments.... He has become one of the really important  
 figures in American literature." <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some Contemporary Americans by Percy W. H. Boynton  
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land. Its mowing fields, its deep silent woods, its animal life, shy and wild, or bound to the toil of the farm, its dawn and evening star, the new moon hanging like a jewel in the heavens, the gorgeous constellations and Northern Lights, the changing processional of the seasons, all are faithfully mirrored in the poems of this observant and careful artist. Nothing, apparently, is too small or insignificant to escape his keen notice, his affectionate or whimsical portrayal; and like the poet Burns, he finds material for his art in some of the least of created things: the cocoon, the butterfly, the piping frogs of spring marshes, turtle eggs, lizards, flies and wasps. What a sense he shows of the harmonious natural features of his picture, and what joy he must have felt in apprehending them, and crystallizing them in unforgettable lines of poetic beauty!

The exactness of his observation is at once apparent in the opening line of The Star-Splitter<sup>1</sup> ...

You know Orion always comes up sideways...  
Throwing a leg up over our fence of mountains,  
And rising on his hands.

Anyone who has noted the oblique effect of this constellation in the winter heavens will appreciate the admirable metaphor which the poet has used here.



land. The morning glades, the deep silent woods, the  
animal life, any and wild, or bound to the fold of the  
fawn, the dawn and evening star, the new moon hanging  
like a jewel in the heavens, the gorgeous constellations  
and northern lights, the changing procession of the  
seasons, all are faithfully mirrored in the poems of  
this observant and careful artist. Nothing, apparently,  
is too small or insignificant to escape his keen notice,  
his affectionate or whimsical portrayal; and like the  
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piping plover of spring marshes, turtle eggs, lilies,  
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natural features of his picture, and what joy he must  
have felt in apprehending them, and crystallizing them  
in unforgettable lines of poetic beauty!

The exactness of his observation is at once  
apparent in the opening line of The Star-Sailor ...  
I  
You know Orion always comes up sideways...  
There's a lot up over the ridge of mountains,  
and rising on his hands.

Anyone who has noted the oblique effect of this con-  
stellation in the winter heavens will appreciate the  
artist's metaphor with the poet has used here.

Again, no least detail of a summer evening in the country is missed in Ghost House<sup>1</sup> -- "the small dim star", black bats tumbling and darting as night comes on, the old cellar-hole "in which the daylight falls", which is now overgrown with "purple-stemmed wild raspberries", the whippoorwill first heard far away, then nearer with his "shout and hush and cluck". One line shows especially the poet's originality of thought and expression. He notes that where formerly there had been a path through the grass, it has now disappeared.

"The footpath down to the well is healed."

It would seem that none of these natural objects is put into his picture for the sake of making an effect, but just because it is there, and he can no more avoid seeing it than he can fail to speak of it as he dwells on the scene.

In The Vantage Point,<sup>2</sup> the poet from a slope looks down on the houses of men and the graves on the opposite hill; but he says that if he has "too much of these" he has only to turn on his arm to "smell the earth" and "look into the crater of an ant".

This background of nature seems to resolve itself into a catalogue of our New England birds, flowers,

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost p.6

2 Ibid p.24



And, no least detail of a sunset over the  
country is missed in Ghost House<sup>1</sup> -- "the small dim star,"  
black-bone shadowing and burning as night comes on, the  
old cellar-hole "in which the daylight falls", which is  
now overgrown with "purple-crested wild strawberries",  
the whippoorwill first heard far away, then nearer with  
its "shout and hush and cluck". One line shows espe-  
cially the poet's originality of thought and expression.  
He notes that where formerly there had been a path  
through the grass, it has now disappeared.

"The footpath down to the well is sealed."

It would seem that none of these natural objects is  
put into his picture for the sake of making an effect, but  
just because it is there, and he can no more avoid seeing  
it than he can fail to speak of it as he dwells on the  
scene.

<sup>2</sup>  
In The Yastreb Tolia, the poet from a slope

looks down on the houses of men and the trees on the  
opposite hill; but he says that if he has "too much of  
these" he has only to turn on his arm to "greet the  
earth" and "look into the crater of an ash".

This background of nature seems to resolve itself  
into a catalogue of our New England birds, flowers,

trees, and animals, and the writer has made some study of Frost's inclusiveness of these particular features, together with the seasonal landscapes for their setting.

Birds In considering the first of these classes, the birds, we find a very frequent mention of birds in general, as well as entire poems devoted to some particular bird or birds: for example, The Oven Bird, A Minor Bird, Our Singing Strength, and Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter.<sup>1</sup>

In the second of these, the poet shows a slight annoyance, such as we all have felt at times, at the monotonous, oft-repeated note of the songster.

I have clapped my hands at him from the door  
When it seemed as if I could bear no more.

But he ends with the whimsical half apology for his mood in the delightful couplet

And of course there must be something wrong  
In wanting to silence any song.

In the other poems his joy in the birds, his care for them, and his real friendship for the singers of orchard and woodland are obvious. In The Woodpile<sup>2</sup> we find this reference to one of them which shows Frost's characteristic appreciation of the bird's point of view.

A small bird flew before me. He was careful  
To put a tree between us when he lighted,  
And say no word to tell me who he was...  
He thought that I was after him for a feather-  
The white one in his tail; like one who takes

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost: The Oven Bird p.150  
A Minor Bird p.316-Our Singing Strength p.297  
Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter p.287

2 Ibid: The Woodpile p.126



trees, and animals, and the writer has made some study of  
Frost's insensitiveness of these particular features,  
together with the seasonal changes for their setting.  
Birds - In considering the birds of these states, and  
birds, we find a very frequent mention of birds  
in general, as well as specific names devoted to some par-  
ticular birds or birds: for example, The Green Heron,  
A Marsh Bird, The Marshy Sparrow, and looking for a  
Summer Bird in Winter. In the second of these, the  
poet shows a slight annoyance, such as we all have felt  
at times, at the monotonous, off-repeated note of the  
songster.

I have eloped my hands at him from the door  
When it seemed as if I could hear no more.  
But he ends with the smallest half apology for his  
need in the delightful couplet  
And of course there must be something wrong  
In waiting to silence any song.  
In the other poem which is the bird, the  
care for them, and his real interest for the winter  
of orchard and woodland are obvious. In The Woodpile  
we find this reference to one of them which shows Frost's  
characteristic appreciation of the bird's point of view.  
A small bird flew before me. He was careful  
To put a twig between us when he landed,  
And say no word to tell me who he was...  
He thought that I was after him for a winter  
The while and in his tale; I had been taken

I collected poems by Robert Frost: The Green Heron p. 120  
A Marsh Bird p. 118 - The Marshy Sparrow p. 127  
Looking for a Summer Bird in Winter p. 127  
2 birds: The Woodpile p. 120

Everything said as personal to himself.

Of definite species, the writer has found eighteen birds mentioned: the oven bird, bluebird, chickadee, woodpecker, humming-bird, swallow, blue-jay, night-hawk, chewink, crow, thrush, blackbird, sparrow, robin, feather-hammer, and phoebe.

Among the poet's descriptions of these may be noticed the same careful observation and striking, picture-making delineation that mark all his work. Take, for example, these lines on the humming-bird in the poem A Prayer in Spring.<sup>1</sup>

...the darting bird  
That suddenly above the bees is heard,  
The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,  
And off a blossom in mid-air stands still.

It would be hard to find a more exact description or a lovelier of this tiny, winged creature's habitual method of extracting nectar from the flowers.

Flowers and  
Plants

Of flowers and plants, no less than forty different varieties appear in the Collected Poems. These, again, are such as anyone who has lived long in New England will recognize. It is interesting to trace, also, through their mention, Frost's knowledge of their seasonal appearance, from the hepatica, blood-root, bluet, trillium, violet of early spring, the

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost  
A Prayer in Spring p.17



Every bird is personal to himself.

Of definite species, the writer has found sixteen birds mentioned: the oven bird, bluebird, chickadee, woodpecker, hermit-warbler, warbler, blue-jay, kinglet, crow, junco, bluebird, sparrow, robin, vesper sparrow, and thrush.

Among the poet's descriptions of these may be noticed the same careful observation and attention, the three-act definition that mark all his work. Take, for example, these lines on the humming-bird in the poem

A Prayer in Spring.

...the darting bird  
That suddenly above the trees is seen,  
The meteor that turns in with the bill,  
And off a blossom in mid-air, almost still.

It would be hard to find a more exact description of the lover of this bird, whose creature's radiant method of capturing insects from the flowers.

Flowers and Leaves  
Of flowers and leaves, no less than  
For the different varieties appear in

The collected poems. These, again, are such as anyone who has lived long in New England will recognize. It is interesting to know, also, through their mention, the knowledge of their seasonal appearance, from the delicate, blood-red, blue, brilliant, violet of early spring, the

clover, mullein, hardhack, jewel-weed, orchis, wild-rose of summer, to the golden-rod, aster, clematis, witch-hazel of autumn. The mention of the flower generally gives its habitat, also; for example, the jewel-weed is found near the brook; and the trillium among the birch brush piled in a clearing. The poet says of the latter that it had budded before the brush was piled there,

And since it was coming up had to come.<sup>1</sup>

The orchises were in

A saturated meadow,  
Sun-shaped and jewel-small,  
A circle scarcely wider  
Than the trees around were tall;  
Where winds were quite excluded,  
And the air was stifling sweet  
With the breath of many flowers  
A temple of the heat. 2

This same exquisite poem shows, also, the real nature lover's care for the preservation of our native wild-flowers.

We raised a simple prayer  
Before we left the spot,  
That in the general mowing  
That place might be forgot.

The fireweed he describes as "loving where woods have burnt"--the lupine, as "living on sand and drouth"--<sup>3</sup> the clematis "had wound strings round and round "the pile of wood in the "frozen swamp".<sup>4</sup>

He is naturalist enough to know that the flowers of the witch-hazel come last of all the fall blossoms;

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost: Pea Brush p.154

2 Ibid: Rose Pogonias p.19

3 Ibid: A Passing Glimpse p.311

4 Ibid: The Wood-Pile p.126





he speaks of the "last lone aster" being gone when the blossoms of the former are drooping;<sup>1</sup> in the poem The Self-Seeker<sup>2</sup> his central character is making a list of the "flora of the valley", and is acquainted with Ram's Horn orchids and Yellow Lady-Slippers; and he has had a letter from Burroughs about the *Cypripedium reginae*. The same care already referred to for the preservation of these rare beauties is shown in this poem. The little girl who has brought the Ram's Horn orchid to the crippled naturalist is asked by him if there were no others where she found this one. She answers

"There are four or five.  
I knew you wouldn't let me pick them all...  
I wanted there should be some there next year."

Trees Of trees, those that appear most commonly in New England woods and on the farms are mentioned over and over again in Frost's poems. The writer has checked twenty varieties of these. The orchard trees are the apple, peach, pear, plum, and cherry. The lilac bush, so often found around country houses, and still blooming beside many empty cellar-holes today, seems to be infrequently referred to, whereas the birch is a favorite of the poet since he has several poems devoted to this one tree. One is the familiar Birches<sup>3</sup> in which the boy is "a swinger of birches".

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost: Reluctance p.43

2 Ibid: The Self-Seeker p.117

3 Ibid: Birches p.152



he speaks of the "first love letter" being sent when the  
piousness of the former are forgotten; in the poem  
The Salt-Stacker his central character is depicted as first  
of the "effort of the valley", and is associated with  
Sam's Horn anchors and Yellow Lad, Blipsey; and he has  
had a letter from Blipsey about the Cyprian  
reunion. The same story already referred to for the  
preservation of these two legends is shown in this poem.  
The first line who has brought the Sam's Horn anchor to  
the original material is asked by him if there were  
no others where she found this one. The answers

"There are four or five.  
I knew you wouldn't let me pick any more, did you?  
I wanted there should be some more next year."

Three Of these, those that appear, are commonly in  
New England words and on the same day were

found over and over again in Frost's poems. The  
author has selected twenty varieties of them. The  
order of these are the spirit, peace, past, glad, and happy.  
The first part, so often found around country houses, and  
still appearing beside many happy country houses today,  
seems to be anthropomorphically referred to, whereas the third  
is a favorite of the poet since he has several poems  
devoted to this one. One is the familiar Winter  
in which the boy is "a whisper of himself".

One by one he subdued his father's trees  
By riding them down over and over again.

In another poem on the birch tree, Wild Grapes,<sup>1</sup> a girl is the central figure. She has accompanied her brother to the woods in search of wild grapes, and anxious to gather them from the vines that have run up over the tree, she took hold of the branches he bent down to her, and when he let go she "swung suspended with the grapes"! Again, in the poem New Hampshire<sup>2</sup> the poet says of the birch

Her unpruned grapes...flung like lariats  
Far up the birches out of reach of men.

He uses birch for bushing his peas as he tells us in Pea Brush;<sup>3</sup> and in Home Burial<sup>4</sup> we have the lines

Three foggy mornings and one rainy day  
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build.

#### Animals

As far as animals other than birds are concerned, all those found on the farm are mentioned in connection with their work: dogs, cows, horses, hens and chickens, and oxen. In the fields and woods the poet runs across the woodchuck, snake, rabbit, skunk, deer and bear. He evidently liked to hear the hylas or small piping frogs of early spring, for he has numerous references to them.

The Hyla breed  
That shouted in the mist a month ago

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost: Wild Grapes p.240

2 Ibid: New Hampshire p.199; 3 Ibid: Pea Brush p.154

4 Ibid: Home Burial p.69



One by one he reached his father's trees  
By rising them down ever and over again.  
In another poem on the Birch tree, Wild Grapes, a little  
is the central figure. She has accompanied her brother  
to the woods in search of wild grapes, and anxious to  
gather them from the vines that have run up over the  
trees, she took hold of the branches he bent down to her,  
and when he let go she "swung suspended with the grapes!"  
Again, in the poem New Hampshire,<sup>2</sup> the last part of the  
Birch

Her unnumbered grapes... Time like Icarus  
Far up the birches out of reach of hand.  
He uses Birch for pushing his nose as he tells us in  
For Erasm; and in Home Burial<sup>4</sup> we have the lines  
Three forty mornings and one rainy day  
Will not the best birch leaves a man can build.

Antony as for as animals other than birds are con-  
cerned, all those found on the farm are men-  
tioned in connection with their work: dogs, cows, horses,  
hens and chickens, and oxen. In the fields and woods  
the poet runs across the woodchuck, snake, rabbit, mouse,  
deer and bear. He evidently liked to hear the hymns on  
small piping notes of early spring, for he has numerous  
references to them.

The Wild Grapes  
That showed in the mist a white and

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost: Wild Grapes p. 240  
2 Ibid: New Hampshire p. 197; 3 Ibid: For Erasm p. 114  
4 Ibid: Home Burial p. 50

Like ghost of sleigh-bells in a ghost of snow.<sup>1</sup>  
What an exquisite line is that last, how true to the  
silvery call of the small peepers, and what a feeling  
of the vanishing winter and intermittent spring of  
northern New England it gives!

Of the domestic animals, none is celebrated more  
perfectly than the Morgan colt in The Runaway.<sup>2</sup> Of this  
poem Louis Untermeyer says, "Who but Frost could sum-  
mon, with so few strokes, the frightened colt with one  
forefoot on the wall, the other curled at his breast"?<sup>3</sup>

'I think the little fellow is afraid of the snow.  
He isn't winter-broken. It isn't play  
With the little fellow at all. He's running away.  
I doubt if even his mother could tell him, "Sakes,  
It's only weather." He'd think she didn't know!  
Where is his mother? He can't be out alone.'<sup>2</sup>

How effective is the line, what economy of words in

And all his tail that isn't hair up straight.<sup>2</sup>

Then a glimpse of the poet's tenderness again in

'Whoever it is that leaves him out so late,  
When other creatures have gone to stall and bin,  
Ought to be told to come and take him in.'<sup>2</sup>

In The Mountain,<sup>4</sup> the poet tells of meeting a country-  
man

...who moved so slow  
With white-faced oxen in a heavy cart,  
It seemed no harm to stop him altogether.

Could any more delightfully whimsical and expressive

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost: Hyla Brook p.149

2 Ibid: The Runaway p.273; 3 Modern American Poetry by

Louis Untermeyer p.255; 4 Collected Poems by Frost p.56



like those of white-bells in a hour of snow.  
What an exquisite line is that last, how true to the  
silvery call of the night jockey, and what a feeling  
of the vanishing winter and instant spring of  
northern New England it gives!

Of the domestic animals, none is celebrated more  
perfectly than the Norman cow in The Highway.<sup>2</sup> Of this  
poem Louis Untermeyer says, "Who but Frost could sym-  
bolize, with so few strokes, the frightened cow with one  
forefoot on the wall, the other under its breast?"

"I think the little fellow is afraid of the snow.  
He isn't winter-broken. It isn't gray  
With the little fellow at all. He's running away.  
I doubt if even his mother could tell him, 'Gee,  
it's only weather.' He'd think she didn't know!  
Where is his mother? He can't be out alone."<sup>3</sup>

How effective is the line, what economy of words in  
and all his tail that isn't built up straight.

Then a glimpse of the poet's tenderness again in

"However it is that leaves him out so late,  
When other creatures have gone to rest and all  
Ought to be told to come and take him in."<sup>4</sup>

In The Roadside,<sup>5</sup> the poet tells of meeting a country-

man

...who moved so slow  
With white-faces even in a heavy coat,  
It seemed no harm to stop him altogether.

Could any more delicately whiskered and expressive

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost: Hyle Brook N. 1915  
2 The Highway, p. 173; 3 Northern American Poetry by  
Louis Untermeyer, p. 256; 4 Collected Poems by Robert Frost

lines depict the plodding gait of these cumbersome creatures! As the countryman is driving oxen and not horses, it seems natural for him to liken the steaming of the mountain-top brook that was "warm in winter" to an "ox's breath".<sup>1</sup> The closing lines of the poem return to the picture of the oxen with which it began:

He drew the oxen toward him with light touches  
Of his slim goad on nose and offside flank,  
Gave them their marching orders and was moving.

One of the most humorous of all Frost's poems is The Cow in Apple Time.<sup>2</sup> What could be more ridiculous than his picture of this usually mild animal intoxicated with her over-indulgence in the orchard!

Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools  
A cider syrup....  
She runs from tree to tree...  
She bellows on a knoll against the sky  
Her udder shrivels and the milk goes dry.

Something of the same affection for a horse which is apparent in The Runaway<sup>3</sup> is found in Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,<sup>4</sup> that loveliest of poems.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost: The Mountain p.56

2 Ibid: The Cow in Apple Time p.157; 3 Ibid: The Runaway

p.273

4 Ibid: Stopping by Woods etc. p.275



lines against the glowing East of these enormous  
creations! As the countryman is driving over and not  
horses, it seems natural for him to liken the standing  
of the mountain-top brook that was "white in winter" to  
an "ox's breath".<sup>1</sup> The electric lines of the poem

return to the notion of the oxen with which it began:  
He drew the oxen forward with light tapers  
Of his slim knees on horse and offside flank,  
Gave them their morning orders and was gone.

One of the most important of all Frost's poems is  
The Cow in Apple Time.<sup>2</sup> What could be more delightful  
than his picture of his happily milked animal intoxicated  
with her own-liquor in the orchard!

Her face is flushed with pomace and the frolic  
A little swayed....  
The tree-trunk to knee....  
The balance on a knoll against the sky.  
Her sides swayed and the milk was dry.

Comparison of the cow's attitude to a horse which is  
agitated in the highway is found in Stopping by Woods  
on a Snowy Evening, that loveliest of poems.<sup>3</sup>

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.  
He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only sound is the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.  
The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

<sup>1</sup> Collected from my notebook: The Mountain's P. 55  
<sup>2</sup> 1915: The Cow in Apple Time P. 127; 3 1915: The Journey  
P. 212  
<sup>3</sup> 1915: Stopping by Woods etc. P. 128



In the poet's pictures of wild animal life, perhaps none is finer than that of the doe and the buck in Two Look at Two.<sup>1</sup> The lovers have stopped in their climb, and are about to turn back since night is coming on. As they pause by a tumbledown wall looking up the path they have given up attempting

A doe from round a spruce stood looking at them  
Across the wall, as near the wall as they...  
The difficulty of seeing what stood still,  
Like some up-ended boulder split in two  
Was in her clouded eyes: they saw no fear there...  
Then, as if they were something that, though strange,  
She could not trouble her mind with too long,  
She sighed and passed unscared along the wall...  
A buck from round the spruce stood looking at  
them...

This was an antlered buck of lusty nostril,...  
He viewed them quizzically with jerks of head,  
As if to ask, 'Why don't you make some motion?  
Or give some sign of life? Because you can't.  
I doubt if you're as living as you look.'  
Then he too passed unscared along the wall.

Scenes from  
Country Landscapes

Every season of the year provides background or setting

for Frost's poems. Beginning with A Prayer in Spring<sup>2</sup> the poet wishes to savor the exquisite, fleeting beauty of this time of year:

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers today;  
And give us not to think so far away  
As the uncertain harvest; keep us here  
All simply in the springing of the year.

Full summer seems to blaze behind The Tuft of Flowers.<sup>3</sup>

I went to turn the grass once after one  
Who mowed it in the dew before the sun...

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost: Two Look at Two p.282

2 Ibid: A Prayer in Spring p.17

3 Ibid: The Tuft of Flowers p.31



In the poet's pictures of wild animal life, perhaps  
none is finer than that of the dog and the bush in  
Two Look at Two. The lovers have stopped in their  
aim, and are about to turn back since night is coming  
on. As they stand by a thicket of willow looking up the  
path they have given up attempting

A dog from round a corner stood looking at them  
across the wall, as near the wall as they...  
The difficulty of seeing what was going on  
like some un-ended border again in two  
Was in her clouded eyes: they saw no face there...  
Then, as if they were something else, though strange,  
She said not a word to him with her face  
She sighed and passed unheeding along the wall...  
A dog from round the corner stood looking at  
them...

This was an English dog of English ancestry...  
He viewed them curiously with looks of hate,  
As if to ask, 'Why don't you make some motion?  
Or give some sign of life? Because you can't!  
I don't see you as living as you look.'  
Then he too passed unheeding along the wall.

Every corner of the wall was  
filled with the sound of weeping

for Frost's poem. Beginning with A Winter in Spring  
the poet would to never the end of it, looking back  
of this time of year:

Oh, give us pleasure in the flower today;  
and give us not to think no way  
as the orchard harvest; keep us here  
all simply in the spring of the year.

Will never return to him behind the first of flowers.  
I want to turn the corner once after one  
who moved it in the dog before the sun...

I collected poems by Robert Frost: Two Look at Two p. 22  
A Winter in Spring p. 17  
The Last of Flowers p. 21

I looked for him behind an isle of trees;  
I listened for his whetstone on the breeze...

..... there passed me by  
On noiseless wing a bewildered butterfly.

He turned..and led my eye to look  
At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook,

A leaping tongue of flame the scythe had spared  
Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup>  
Frost's October, in his desire to have the beauty of  
this season prolonged reminds us of the following lines  
in Edna St. Vincent Millay's God's World<sup>3</sup>

My soul is all but out of me,--let fall  
No burning leaf.

Frost writes

O hushed October morning mild,  
Begin the hours of this day slow.  
Make the day seem to us less brief...  
Release one leaf at break of day;  
At noon release another leaf...  
Retard the sun with gentle mist;  
Enchant the land with amethyst.

Poem after poem takes us through the beauty of nature  
in different seasonal moods. Coming to winter, we find a  
long narrative poem called Snow<sup>4</sup> in which the characters  
are set against one of those overwhelming snow-storms  
that beset New England in the winter time. A neighbor,  
Brother Meserve, has stopped at the Coles' at midnight  
on his homeward drive, not knowing whether he can get his  
team of horses through the drifts to reach his own  
house that night. The narrative and dialogue are

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost: The Tuft of Flowers p.31

2 Ibid: October p.40; 3 Modern American Poetry, Untermeyer

4 Collected Poems, Frost, p.641  
Snow p.180



I looked for the behind as I left of room;  
I listened for his whisper in the breeze...

On midnight with a whispered syllable,  
These passed on by

He turned... and laid my eye to look  
At a fall of flowers beside a brook;

A leaving tongue of flame the night had stored  
Beside a heavy brook the night had stored.

3  
Prest's October, in his heart to have the beauty of

This season produced feelings as of the following lines

4  
In Eden of Vincent Hill's God's World

For now it is all out of me, -- that I'll  
No longer feel.

From Writings

O human October, morning mild,  
Bless the hour of this day now.  
I like the way the sun has set;  
I like the way the sun has set;  
At noon the sun is in the sky;  
At noon the sun is in the sky;  
At noon the sun is in the sky;  
At noon the sun is in the sky.

From their own books as I read the beauty of nature  
in different seasonal moods. Coming to winter, we find a  
long narrative poem called Jack in which the characters  
are not against the new overpopulation and storms  
that have New England in the winter time. A hundred  
Prest's January, was a story of the winter, at night  
of his heavenly drive, not knowing whether he can see his  
team of horses through the drifts he took his own  
house that night. The narrative and dialogue are

punctuated by descriptions of the increasing storm.

.....A fresh access  
Of wind that caught against the house a moment,  
Gulped snow.....  
You can just see it glancing off the roof  
Making a great scroll upward toward the sky...  
I shouldn't want to hurry you, Meserve,  
But if you're going--Say you'll stay, you know.  
But let me raise this curtain on a scene,  
And show you how it's piling up against you.  
You see the snow-white through the white of frost?  
Ask Helen how far up the sash it's climbed  
Since last we read the gage.<sup>1</sup>

#### NEW ENGLAND BACKGROUND OF HIS POEMS

##### IN PEOPLE

Frost calls North of Boston a "Book of People",  
and it is here that we find New England characters  
as he knows them, albeit the New England that has pro-  
duced them is a decadent one, according to Amy Lowell:  
"the book is an epitome of decaying New England."<sup>2</sup>  
Yes, the book is a sombre one, on the whole, even to the  
most casual reader. Of the sixteen poems included in it,  
at least seven,--The Death of the Hired Man, The Fear,  
Home Burial, The Black Cottage, A Servant to Servants,  
The Housekeeper, and The Self-Seeker, --deal with death,  
mental or moral decay, physical affliction, or loneliness.  
Miss Lowell says that the book is "all the sadder  
because the poet is at no pains to make it so. He is

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost: Snow p.180

2 Tendencies in Modern American Poetry (Robert Frost)  
by Amy Lowell





holding no brief for or against the state of things he portrays, he is too much a part of it himself to exhibit it as an illustration of anything."<sup>1</sup>

G. R. Elliott thinks that Miss Lowell overestimates this sadness as Louis Untermeyer does Frost's gladness. Elliott says, "It is neither sad nor glad. The burdens and limitations of the neighborhood keep the poet from being very glad; but his faith in the latent value of the neighborly spirit prevents him from being very sad."<sup>2</sup>

Another critic says of Frost's characters, "They are products of duress and adversity...Their human contacts have not been varied for they are far from the main traveled roads."<sup>3</sup>

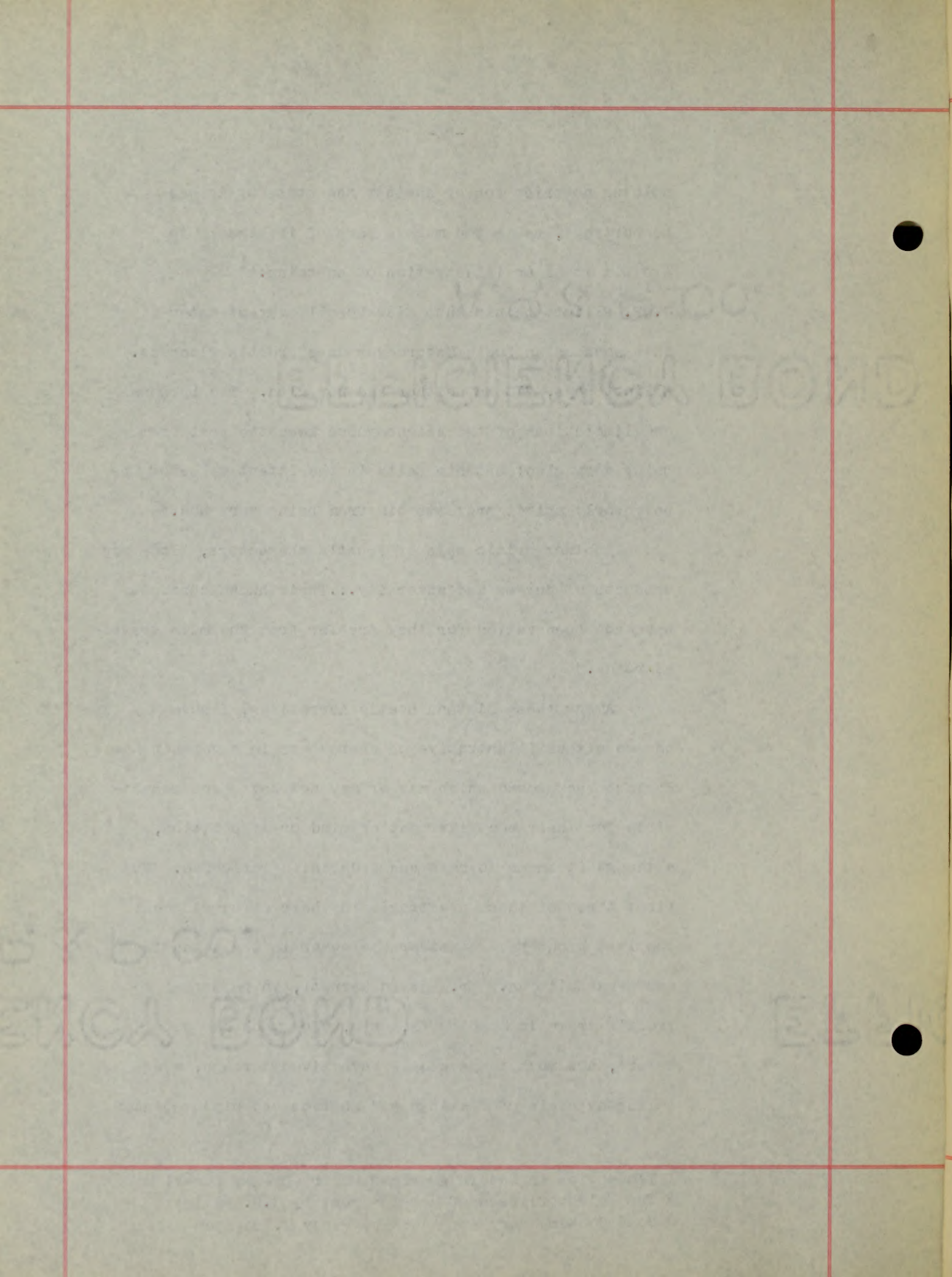
Among these sixteen poetic narratives, I have chosen six as illustrative of characters in a certain New England background which may or may not have been responsible for their peculiar bent of mind or disposition, although it seems to have had a definite influence. The first three of these are tragic in their circumstances: the last group have considerable humor in the situation and personalities. Mr. Edward Garnett, in referring to Frost's dramatic monologues, says, "How much has gone before, how much these people have lived through, what a lengthy chain of feelings and motives and circumstances

1 Tendencies in Modern American Poetry by Amy Lowell

2 The Neighborliness of Robert Frost by G.R. Elliott

3 Some Contemporary Americans by Percy H. Boynton







has shaped their actions and mental attitudes."<sup>1</sup>

In answer to why some of these stories might not just as well have been in prose, this same critic says that they come "with greater intensity in rhythm." He states that Frost has what Goethe gave as a definition of poetry--"a lively feeling of situations and an aptitude to describe them."

Home Burial Of these idyls of New England country life one of the most poignant and terrible is Home Burial.<sup>2</sup> The poem tells of a mother who has just lost her baby, and, since she has no other child to occupy herself with, is slowly losing her mind from grief. In her morbid condition she has become estranged from her husband who seems to her very callous and unfeeling. To intensify the tragedy, the baby has been buried by the father in one of those little home burying grounds which are sometimes found in New England country places on the farms. The writer was familiar with such a one in her childhood on her cousin's farm not forty miles from Boston,--a quiet lot under tall pines, walled around with field stone; and here the one remaining member of a family that has "run out" will be buried. The mother in the poem, haunted by grief, can

1 A New American Poet by Edward Garnett; Atlantic Monthly  
Aug. 1915

2 Collected Poems by Robert Frost p.69



has engaged their actions and mental activities.  
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Home Burial Of these idylls of New England country  
life one of the most poignant and  
sensitive is Home Burial. The poem tells of a mother  
who has just lost her only son, since she has no other  
child to occupy herself with, is slowly losing her mind  
from grief. In her morbid condition she has become  
estranged from her husband who seems to her very  
delicious and delicious. To intensify the tragedy, the  
boy has been buried by the father in one of those little  
home burying grounds which are everywhere found in New  
England country. The father was  
familiar with such a one in his childhood on his cousin's  
farm not forty miles from Boston--a quiet but under tall  
pines, walled around with field stones; and here the one  
remaining member of a family that has "run out" will be  
buried. The mother in the poem, haunted by grief, and

see the burial place from a window of the house, although the husband has never noticed it from that particular one before.

'What is it you see  
From up there always--for I want to know.'

Then, as the wife, cowering on the stairway, refuses to tell him, he goes up to see for himself what she is looking at, although she, in her anguish and abnormal mental condition is quite sure that he will not see anything.

And a while he didn't see.  
But at last he murmured, 'Oh', and again, 'Oh!...  
'The wonder is I didn't see at once.  
I never noticed it from here before.  
I must be wonted to it--that's the reason.  
The little graveyard where my people are!'

Of this custom of burying members of the family on the home grounds Miss Amy Lowell says, "Catholic countries with their insistence on consecrated ground in which to lay the dead, give no chance for horror like this."<sup>3</sup>

The poem continues with a bitter argument between husband and wife, he thinking she is carrying her grief too far, particularly since he loves her, which seems to count for nothing in her mind.

'God, what a woman! And it's come to this,  
A man can't speak of his own child that's dead';  
and she, upbraiding him for his hardness of heart, his lack of sympathy with a mother's feeling. The poor

1 Collected Poems by Frost: Home Burial p.69

2 Ibid

3 Tendencies in Modern American Poetry by Amy Lowell



and the burial place from a window of the house, although  
the husband has never noticed it from that particular  
one before.

'What is it you see  
from up there always--for I want to know?'  
Then, as the wife, cowering on the stairs, refused to  
tell him, he forced up to see for himself that she is looking  
at, although she, in her weakness and abnormal mental con-  
dition is quite sure that he will not see anything.

And a while he didn't see.  
But at last he murmured, 'Oh, she again, 'Gai...'  
'The wonder is I didn't see at once.'  
I never noticed it from here before.  
I must be wanted to it--that's the reason.  
The little graveyard where my people are!'

Of this custom of burying members of the family on the  
home grounds Miss Amy Lowell says, "Gothic sentiment  
with their insistence on consecrated ground in which to  
lay the dead, give no chance for horror like this."  
The poem continues with a bitter argument between hus-  
band and wife, he thinking she is carrying her grief too  
far, particularly since he loves her, which seems to count  
for nothing in her mind.

'God, what a woman! And it's none to this,  
A man can't speak of his own child that's dead';  
and she, repelling him for his hardness of heart, his  
lack of sympathy with a mother's feeling. The poem

woman cries out, in answer to her husband's previous outburst,

'You can't because you don't know how to speak.  
If you had any feelings, you that dug  
With your own hand--how could you?--his little  
grave;

I saw you from that very window there,  
Making the gravel leap and leap in air,  
Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly  
And roll back down the mound beside the hole...  
You could sit there with the stains on your shoes  
Of the fresh earth from your own baby's grave  
And talk about your every day concerns.' <sup>1</sup>

Frantic with grief, and mentally unsound, she seeks to run away from the house, the husband declaring that he will follow and bring her back by force. We pity the mother, but we also sympathize with the husband whom she has turned against in her deranged condition. In spite of her charges that he is unfeeling, he seems patient and considerate. He begs her to listen to him, pleads that he doesn't seem to be able to say anything that doesn't offend her, suggests some arrangement whereby he will not speak of anything likely to hurt her, at the same time feeling helplessly that he doesn't understand such grief as hers, that she overdoes it a little.

'A man must partly give up being a man  
With women-folk.' <sup>2</sup>

We feel the justice of his next remark, as we are ever inclined to the same irritation at the unreasonableness

1 Collected Poems by R. Frost; Home Burial p.69

2 Ibid



even after that, in answer to her husband's previous

comment,

'You can't because you don't know how to speak.  
If you had any feelings, you that say  
With your own hand--how could you--the little  
thing;

I saw you that very night there,  
Looking the great leap and leap in air,  
Leap up, it's that, like that, and just as lightly  
And roll back down the sound beside the hole...  
You could all dance with the stars in your shoes  
Of the flesh earth from your own body's grave  
And talk about your every day tomorrow, I

Frank's wife cried, and wearily answered, she began to

run away from the house, the husband telling that he

will follow and bring her back by force. He hit the

father, but he also sympathizing with the husband when

she has turned against in her damaged condition. In

spite of her charges that he is unfeeling, he seems

feeling and considerate. He begs her to listen to his

pleads that he doesn't need to be able to say anything

that doesn't offend her, suggests some threatened danger

by he will not speak of anything likely to hurt her, at

the same time feeling helplessly that he doesn't understand

stand with what he says, that the mother is a little

'A man must partly give up being a man  
With women-folk.' 2

He feels the burden of his next remark, as he sits away

induced to the new situation of the unresponsiveness

of the mentally unbalanced, when he cries

'What was it brought you up to think it the thing  
To take your mother-loss of a first child  
So inconsolably--in the face of love.'<sup>1</sup>

The poor mother cries out that although the world is evil and forgets as soon as one is in his grave, she will not do so but will hold on to her grief. As she begins to weep, the husband tenderly suggests that she will feel better now, that she will give up her idea of running out to someone, as she has apparently done before, but she exclaims

'I must go--  
Somewhere out of this house.'<sup>2</sup>

It is the environment that has proved too much for her; her case seems hopeless so long as she remains in it.

Of this poem Mr. Garnett says, "For tragic poignancy, Home Burial stands by itself in American poetry."<sup>3</sup>

A Servant  
to Servants

Another of these sombre pictures of lonely living on a remote country farm is found in A Servant to Servants,<sup>4</sup> in which the chief character, the woman narrator of the dramatic monologue has already had one attack of insanity and is fearing another. This overworked farmer's wife is speaking to another woman who has come to camp on the farmer's land, and is telling her how glad she is to see her and to be

1 Collected Poems by Frost: Home Burial p.69;2 Ibid

3 A New American Poet by Edward Garnett

4 Collected Poems by Frost: A Servant to Servants p.82



of the masterly maintained, when he writes  
'What was it that brought you up to think it the thing  
to take your mother-in-law of a little while  
So innocently--in the time of love.'

The poor with troubles and the sorrowful the world is  
evil and forgoes as good as one is in his grave, and  
will not do so but will hold on to the end. As she  
begins to weep, the husband tenderly answers that she  
will feel better now, that she will give up her idea of  
running out to someone, as she has repeatedly done  
before, and she exclaims

'I must go--  
Home, home out of this house.'

It is the environment that has proved too much for her;  
her own sense of helplessness no longer as she remains in it.  
Of this poem Mr. Barrett says, "Her trouble being  
nearly, Home, home! stands by itself in American poetry."

A Sonnet  
to Elizabeth  
Another of these sonnets, published in  
London, 1832, on a French country town  
in form an A Sonnet to Elizabeth, in which the poet  
describes, the woman narrator of the dramatic monologue  
has already had one attack of insanity and is leaving  
another. This overworked father's wife is speaking to  
another woman who has come to camp on the father's land,  
and is telling her how glad she is to see her and to be

kept from her work for a friendly chat that will take her out of herself for a while. As the burdened woman talks, we get a picture of her slaving for a houseful of hungry men.

It's got so I don't know for sure  
Whether I am glad, sorry, or anything.  
There's nothing but a voice-like left inside  
That seems to tell me how I ought to feel.<sup>1</sup>

She goes on to speak of her husband who, being more optimistic than she, thinks that she will be all right with doctoring, and adds

It's not medicine--  
It's rest I want--there, I have said it out--  
From cooking meals for hungry hired men  
And washing dishes after them--from doing  
Things over and over that just won't stay done.<sup>2</sup>

Then she speaks of these hired men, sprawling about the kitchen,--men whom she knows nothing about, not even whether it is safe to have them about, but adds that she is not afraid of them if they are not of her. Here she tells the woman listener that there was insanity in her family, and that she herself has been at the State Asylum. She gives a ghastly description of her father's brother, a madman; of her father's building him a sort of cage and keeping him in the house. To this home, her father had brought his young bride, the speaker's mother who had to help care for the mad creature, and listen to

1 Collected Poems by Frost: A Servant to Servants p.82

2 Ibid



Keep from work for a friendly spot that will take her  
out of herself for a while. As the harassed woman talks,  
we get a picture of her living for a moment of sanity

and

It's not as if I don't know the score  
Whether I am right, sorry, or anything.  
There's nothing but a voice-like left inside  
That seems to tell me how I ought to feel.

She goes on to speak of her husband who, being more  
optimistic than she, thinks that she will be right

with her own, and also

It's not as if I don't know the score  
It's not as if I want--there, I have said it out--  
That looking really for things that  
and washing dishes after them--from doing  
Things over and over that just won't stay done.

Then she speaks of these hired men, worrying about the  
kitchen,--men whom she knows nothing about, not even  
whether it is safe to have them about, but adds that she  
is not afraid of them if they are not of her. Here she  
tells the woman listener that there was insanity in her  
family, and that she herself has been at the State  
Asylum. She gives a family description of her father's  
brother, a nephew of her father's calling him a sort of  
cousin and keeping him in the house. To this man, her  
father has brought his young wife, the speaker's mother  
who had to help care for the mad creature, and later to

his obscene ravings.

She had to lie and hear love things made dreadful  
By his shouts in the night. He'd shout and shout  
Until the strength was shouted out of him,  
And his voice died down slowly from exhaustion.  
He'd pull his bars apart like bow and bowstring,  
And let them go and make them twang until  
His hands had worn them smooth as any oxbow.  
And then he'd crow as if he thought that child's play.<sup>1</sup>

So the poor woman goes on to tell her caller that she  
thinks she is past help herself and must go the road she  
is going. She makes a pathetic reference to the carefree  
life of her camping guest, saying that perhaps she could  
be helped by dropping everything and living out-of-doors,  
but concludes that she would probably soon have enough  
of it, and be glad of a roof overhead.

The Death of  
The Hired Man

One more of these sad pictures and  
then we may turn to something brighter  
and more hopeful. <sup>2</sup>  
The Death of the Hired Man is not of  
the hopelessly tragic type of the two preceding poems.  
It is a dialogue between husband and wife, depicting,  
chiefly through the wife's tender understanding, an old  
man, spent and foredone, who comes home to the place where  
he has previously worked to die.

Mary, the wife, greets her husband, Warren, on his  
return from town, shuts the door behind her carefully,  
and draws her man down beside her on the porch to tell

1 Collected Poems by Frost: A Servant to Servants p.82

2 Ibid: The Death of the Hired Man p.49



his obscure reviews.

She had to live and have things made miserable  
by his silence in the night. He'd shout and shout  
until the strings were snapped out of him,  
and his voice died down slowly from exhaustion.  
He'd yell his bare agonies like how and howling,  
and let that go and make them tremble until  
his hands had been smoothed as any day.  
And then he'd know as if he thought that child's play.

So the poor woman goes on to tell her father that she  
thinks she is just being hateful and that she has been  
to school. She takes a particular pleasure in the unbroken  
life of her unhappy guest, seeing that perhaps she could  
be helped by dropping everything and living out-of-doors,  
but concludes that she would probably soon have enough  
of it, and be glad of a roof overhead.

The Death of  
The Widow  
One more of these sad stories and  
then we may turn to something lighter

and more hopeful. The Death of the Widow is not of  
the hopelessly tragic type of the two preceding poems.  
It is a dialogue between husband and wife, beginning  
lightly through the wife's tender misunderstanding, an old  
man, aged and forsaken, who comes home to the house where  
he has previously worked in life.

Here, the wife, greets her husband, "Welcome, my dear,  
return from town, since the good night has been so late,  
and bring her down down beside her on the path to tell

him that Silas has returned, and to caution him to be kind to the old man. The husband is inclined to be skeptical, and inquires somewhat truculantly when he was ever anything but kind. He insists that he won't have Silas back, that he is not dependable, that he leaves them in the lurch when he is most needed, and is not much good, anyway, at his age. Mary, meantime, draws a sympathetic picture of the poor old man worn out, asleep in the kitchen. With a woman's heart she had prepared tea for him, and had tried to make him comfortable. When her husband jokingly remarks that he supposes Silas told her he had come back to do big things on the farm, she champions the poor old man, saying that of course he did, it was the only way he had of saving his self-respect. She senses that there is something wrong with the old man on account of his jumbled speech,--his mind running on old days at the farm when a college youth haying with him had humiliated him with his superior learning. Mary, tenderly understanding, says of Silas

After so many years he still keeps finding  
Good arguments he sees he might have used.  
I sympathize. I know just how it feels  
To think of the right thing to say too late...  
Poor Silas.....  
Nothing to look backward to with pride,  
And nothing to look forward to with hope. <sup>1</sup>

A very poignant and vivid picture, this, of the worn-



him that Elias had returned, and so caution him to be  
kind to the old man. The impulse to do this  
was, and intuitive somewhat instinctively when he was ever  
anything but kind. He felt that he would save Elias  
back, that he is not dependable, that he wastes time in  
the house when he is most needed, and is not much good,  
anyway, at his age. Very, sometimes, shows a sympathetic  
picture of the poor old man when this, unless in the kitchen.  
With a woman's heart she had trembled for him, and had  
tried to make him comfortable. When her husband kindly  
reports that the old man is still here he had come back to  
be his friend on the far, and sometimes the poor old man,  
again that of course he did, it was the only way he had  
of getting his self-interest. She knew that there is  
something wrong with the old man on account of his limited  
speech,--his mind running on his date at the time when a  
religion youth having with him had finished his with his  
superior learning. Very, sometimes, under-stands, says he

Elias

After so many years he still keeps thinking  
Good arguments he could he might have made.  
I sympathize. I know that now it feels  
to think of the right thing to say to him....  
From Elias.....  
Waiting to look forward to with him,  
and waiting to look forward to with him.

A very potent and with picture, this, of the town-



out old man, but quite as strongly and clearly limned is Mary seated on the porch, her hand "among the harp-like morning glory strings"<sup>1</sup> playing unheard tender promptings in the heart of her husband. How effective in its laconic simplicity is the ending of this beautiful story:--

Warren returned--too soon it seemed to her,  
Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.  
'Warren?' she questioned.  
'Dead', was all he answered.<sup>2</sup>

Louis Untermeyer says of this poem that it is "one of the finest genre pictures of our time."<sup>3</sup>

There are three poems, at least, in the North of Boston group which, in contrast to those discussed above, show the poet's humor,--in spite of Miss Lowell's statement that "he is never whimsical or quaint."<sup>4</sup>

A Hundred Collars                      The first of these, A Hundred Collars,<sup>5</sup>  
tells of a timid professor who, on returning to summer in a small country town where he was born, misses a train connection and is obliged to spend the night in a crowded hotel sharing a room with a huge, half-drunken, talkative salesman of whom he is afraid. This fellow, struggling into his starched shirt in preparation for making a night of it, obligingly offers the learned one, on discovering that he wears a size fourteen, a hundred out-grown collars which he has back home. As

1 Collected Poems by Frost: The Death of the Hired Man p.49

2 Ibid; 3 Modern American Poetry by Untermeyer p.254

4 Tendencies in Modern American Poetry by Amy Lowell

5 Collected Poems by Frost: A Hundred Collars p.61



and old men, but quite as vigorously and effectively as in  
many cases on the other, for here the heart-  
rending story of the "little girl" is given in a  
line to the heart of her husband. How effective in its  
action is the story of the death of this beautiful every-  
body's favorite--  
"The little girl" is a story of a girl who was  
died, was all the answer.

Louis Untermeyer says of this poem that it is "one of the  
finest poems in American literature."

There are three poems, at least, in the form of  
"The little girl" in the form of a story, in the form of a  
story, in the form of a story, in the form of a story,  
show the poet's hand,--in spite of what Lowell's state-  
ment that "he is never without a story."

A Hundred Collars  
The first of these, a Hundred Collars,  
tells of a child who was, on  
returning to school in a small country town where he was  
born, after a year's absence and in which he found  
the night in a crowded hotel where a room with a man,  
left-handed, left-handed, left-handed, left-handed, left-handed,  
this fellow, struggling into his starched shirt in great  
trouble for making a night of it, only to find that  
he had one, on discovering that he was a little boy,  
a hundred post-paid collars which he had back home. As

I Collected these by Lowell: The Death of the Bird, p. 12  
I told; a Modern American Poem by Untermeyer p. 124  
a Modern American Poem by Lowell  
I collected these by Lowell: A Hundred Collars p. 12



if this half contempt of the professor's dimensions were not enough, the huge fellow senses, with the instinct of the slightly intoxicated, the fear of his room-mate, and contrives to humiliate him still further. It is all the more amusing since Frost has been at pains to tell us, in the first place, that the great man was a democrat,

If not at heart, at least on principle..<sup>1</sup>

but that he was seldom able to get near to his country friends. As a parting shot, the shrewd though tipsy salesman says to the professor,

'You'll rest easier when I'm gone perhaps...  
I'll knock so-fashion and peep around the door  
When I come back so you'll know who it is.  
There's nothing I'm afraid of like scared people.  
I don't want you should shoot me in the head.'<sup>2</sup>

Of North of Boston's being a book of people, Mr. Untermeyer says it is more than that--"It is a book of backgrounds as living and dramatic as the people they overshadow."<sup>3</sup> Such a living and dramatic background we have in the poem discussed above: Lafe, the salesman, describes himself as travelling all around the country districts getting subscriptions for the "Weekly News" published in Bow. Fairbanks, the editor, has requested him to find out what people want. In the selection which follows, Frost paints a picture of rural New England scenes

1 Collected Poems by Frost: A Hundred Collars p.61

2 Ibid

3 Modern American Poetry by Louis Untermeyer p.254



if this half century of the progress of the  
not enough, the huge relief senses, with the instinct of the

slightly interested, the fear of his room-mate, and  
creative to illuminate his still further. It is all the  
more amazing since Frost has been at pains to tell us, in

the first place, that the great man was a democrat.

It was at heart, at least on principle...

but that he was willing also to get near to his country

friends. As a party shot, the arrow shows the way

although says to the professor,

'You'll not wonder when I'm gone perhaps...  
I'll knock so-fashion and keep around the door  
when I come back so you'll know who it is.  
There's nothing I'm afraid of like scared people.  
I don't want you should shoot me in the head.'

Of North of Boston's being a book of people, Mr.

Underneath says it is more than that--"It is a book of

backgrounds as living and growing as the people they

overshadow." Such a living and dramatic background we

have in the poem discussed above: here, the salesman,

describes himself as traveling all round the country

discrete certain subscriptions for the "Weekly News"

published in New England; the editor, who requested him

to find out what people want. In the selection which

follows, Frost paints a picture of rural New England scenes

which is faithful, vivid, and direct. He puts these words into Lafe's mouth:

What I like best's the lay of different farms,  
Coming out on them from a stretch of woods,  
Or over a hill or round a sudden corner.  
I like to find folks getting out in spring,  
Raking the dooryard, working near the house.  
Later they get out further in the fields.  
Everything's shut sometimes except the barn;  
The family's all away in some back meadow.  
There's a hay load a-coming--when it comes...

There's nobody about.

The chimney, though, keeps up a good brisk smoking.<sup>1</sup>

The Code Another of these whimsical poems is The Code, which tells of a farmer who was not liked by the gang hired to help him with his haying on account of his driving them so hard, though to do the man justice, he was a worker himself. The poet says of him

I couldn't find  
That he kept any hours--not for himself.  
Daylight and lantern-light were one to him...  
But what he liked was someone to encourage.  
Them that he couldn't lead he'd get behind  
And drive, the way you can, you know, in mowing--  
Keep at their heels and threaten to mow their  
legs off.<sup>2</sup>

One of the hired men who had been irritated by these unpleasant ways of the "boss" planned to play a trick on him that should teach him to be more considerate. This helper was on top of the piled hay-rack in the barn, the farmer waiting below to receive the hay which was to be pitched off into a recess in the building: that is, the

1 Collected Poems by Frost: A Hundred Collars p.61

2 Ibid: The Code p.90



which is faithful, vivid, and direct. He puts these words

into Lato's mouth:

What I like best's the lay of different farms,  
 Coming out on them from a stretch of woods,  
 Or over a hill or round a sudden corner.  
 I like to find John getting out in spring,  
 Baking the footyards, working near the house.  
 Later they get out further in the field.  
 Everything's about something except the barn;  
 The family's all away in some back meadow.  
 There's a day load something--even it comes...  
 There's nobody about.  
 The chimney, though, keeps up a good brisk smoking.

The Code Another of these whistled poems is The Code.

which tells of a farmer who was not liked by

the game hired to help him with his boy in an account of

the driving them so hard, though to do the man justice,

he was a worthy fellow. The poet says of him

I couldn't find  
 That he had any fault for himself.  
 Daylight and lantern-light were one to him...  
 But what he liked was someone to accompany.  
 Then that he couldn't find he'd get behind  
 And drive, the way you can, the man, in motion--  
 Keep at their heels and the rest to now their  
 legs off.

One of the hired men who had been irritated by these

unpleasant ways of the "boss" planned to play a trick on

him that should teach him to be more considerate. This

happened was on top of the hired boy-work in the barn, the

farmer waiting him to receive the hay which was to be

blended into a rest in the building; that is, the

load was not to be pitched on to the mow, as is sometimes the case, but down into this bay. Now when the farmer below looked up and shouted to the hired man on the load, "Let her come!" --the latter took him at his word and "dumped the rackful on him in ten lots".

I looked over the side once in the dust  
And caught sight of him treading-water-like,  
Keeping his head above...  
He squeaked like a squeezed rat.<sup>1</sup>

Later, as the man telling the story is cooling off outside the barn,

And sort of waiting to be asked about it,  
One of the boys sings out, "Where's the old man?"

It seems that the humiliated farmer, after digging himself out, had slunk into the kitchen where he was discovered when the boys peered through the window,

Slumped way down in a chair, with both his feet  
Against the stove, the hottest day that summer.  
He looked so clean disgusted from behind  
There was no one that dared to stir him up.<sup>2</sup>

Blueberries Again, the humor of such a poem as

<sup>3</sup>  
Blueberries is refreshing. This poem,

which seems to be quite as much in praise of blueberries as a study of man, begins with a conversation between two persons, evidently the poet and his wife, concerning the abundance and size of the blueberries to be found in the pasture of one Patterson,--a man who "won't make the fact



found was not to be allowed on to the mat, as in consequence  
the case, but down into this way. Now when the former  
below looked up and looked to the third man on the road,  
"Let her come!" -- the latter took him at his word and  
"I'm sorry the reaction on him is too late".

I looked over the side once in the past  
And caught sight of him wearing water-tight,  
Keeping his head above...  
He answered like a surprised rat.  
Later, as the man telling the story is looking off and  
side the boat,

And sort of waiting to be asked about it,  
One of the boys sings out, "Where's the old man?"  
It seems that the humiliated father, after dipping his  
self out, had sunk into the kitchen where he was dis-  
covered when the boys passed through the window.  
Blurred way down to a chair, with both his feet  
Against the wall, the poorest day in summer.  
He looked so alone, almost from behind  
There was no one that dared to stir him up.

Again, the humor of such a poem as  
Blindness is refreshing. This poem,

which seems to be quite as much in praise of blindness  
as a study of man, dealing with a conversation between two  
persons, evidently the poet and his wife, concerning the  
abundance and also of the blindness to reason in the  
presence of one's father, -- a man who "won't make the least

that they're rightfully his an excuse for keeping us other folk out." <sup>1</sup> The first speaker, presumably the poet, has observed the berries on his way to the village; and after giving his wife a description of their size and luscious appearance, which moves her to remark, "I wonder you didn't see Loren about", he replies with evident relish of the situation, "The best of it was that I did". He goes on to relate how, just after he was getting over the stone wall into the road after looking into the berrying possibilities, he had seen Loren driving by in a democrat-wagon with all his children. Although this fellow had greeted the poet politely enough, the latter had noted a look in his eye as much as to say, "I have left those there berries to ripen too long." Frost comments on Loren's need to be thrifty with so many young ones to feed.

'He has brought them all up on wild berries,  
they say,  
Like birds. They store a great many away.  
They eat them the year round, and those they  
don't eat  
They sell in the store and buy shoes for their  
feet.' 2

The poet's wife observes whimsically that she wishes she knew as much as the whole flock of Lorens did about where to find the berries and when they were ready for picking, and her husband humorously reminds her how, when they first came to live there, he had asked Loren,

1 Collected Poems by Frost: Blueberries p.78

2 Ibid



that they're actually his no excuse for keeping us other  
folk out." The first speaker, presumably the poet, was  
observed the berries on his way to the village; and after  
giving him with a description of their size and location  
appearance, which moves her to remark, "I wonder you  
didn't see John about", he replied with evident relief  
of the situation, "The best of it was that I did". He goes  
on to relate how, just after he was visiting over the  
stone wall into the road after looking into the berrying  
possibilities, he had seen John driving by in a demure-  
wagon with all his children. Although this relief had  
eased the poet belatedly enough, the latter had noted a  
look in his eye as much as to say, "I have left these  
these berries to ripen too long." "What comments on John's  
need to be lively with so many young ones to feed.  
He has brought them all up on wild berries,  
they say, like birds. They store a great many away.  
They eat them the year round, and those they  
don't eat  
They sell in the store and buy shoes for their  
feet."

The poet's wife queries whimsically that she  
wishes she knew as much as the whole flock of John's did  
about where to find the berries and when they were ready  
for picking, and her husband humorously retorts that now,  
when they first came to live there, he had asked John,

"of all people on earth...if he knew any fruit to be had for the picking."<sup>1</sup>

'The rascal, he said he'd be glad  
To tell if he knew. But the year had been bad.  
There had been some berries--but those were  
all gone.

He didn't say where they had been. He went on:

"I'm sure--I'm sure--as polite as could be.

He spoke to his wife in the door, "Let me see,  
Mame, we don't know any good berrying place?"

It was all he could do to keep a straight face.'<sup>2</sup>

Then the Frosts plan to pick in Patterson's pasture  
themselves this year, and to get there early next morning.

But they don't expect to have the place to themselves  
long; the Lorens will all be there by morning,--possibly  
that very night. They won't be any too friendly, according  
to the poet, although they will be scrupulously polite

To people they look on as having no right  
To pick where they're picking.<sup>3</sup>

This amusing idea of Loren's, that others have no  
right to pick where he is picking, even though he does  
not own the pasture, reminds the writer of summers spent  
on a cousin's farm when she was young. Blueberry-pickers  
in flocks would come up from the nearest town and wander  
throughout Cousin's meadows; but, when they passed the  
house with full pails in the late afternoon, if he tried  
to buy some of his own berries, they would refuse to sell,  
as they knew they could get a better price in the city  
market.

1 Collected Poems by Frost: Blueberries p.78

2 Ibid

3 Ibid



"of all people on earth... if he knew any truth to be had

for the people."

"The reason, he said, he'd be glad  
to tell it to know. But the year had been bad.  
There had been some parties--but those were  
all gone.  
He didn't say where they had been. He was on  
"I'm sure--I'm sure--as politics as would be.  
He spoke to his wife in the room. "Let me see,  
name, we don't know any good partying place?"  
It was all he could do to keep a straight face."

When the friends plan to pick in Patterson's house  
themselves this year, and to get there early next morning.

But they don't expect to have the place to themselves  
long; the friends will all be there by morning,--possibly  
that very night. They won't be any too friendly, according  
to the report, although they will be extremely polite.

To people they look as having no right  
to pick where they like.  
This morning idea of Loren's, that others have no  
right to pick where he is picking, even though he does  
not own the house, certainly the writer of numerous spots  
on a cousin's farm when she was young. Mind-bogglingly  
in black would come up from the nearest town and wander  
throughout Cousin's meadow; but, when they passed the  
house with this girl in the late afternoon, it was tried  
to buy some of his own berries, they would rather be sold  
as they knew they would get a better price in the city  
market.

A GROUP OF INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS

FROM MOUNTAIN INTERVAL

Most of the poems in North of Boston, as I have already stated, are dramatic monologues dealing, for the most part, with characters against a stark background at some tragic moment of their lives. The division which follows, -- Mountain Interval, -- while it is much more lyrical, yet has, in its collection several poems about people, who, though not so impressive as those in North of Boston, are interesting and typical of the scene wherein they are found. Their stories are not so fully told, but they are, nevertheless, vivid characters in a realistic background.

'Out, Out-'      The first of these I shall speak of is the young boy in Out, Out<sup>1</sup> --- only thirty-four lines to tell the whole pathetic story. The men were working at the buzz-saw in the yard on a Vermont farm, and the boy was doing his share. The day was almost over. The poet says that he wishes they might have called it a day: it would have pleased the boy to have an extra half-hour from work, and it would have averted the tragedy. Sister had come out in her apron to call them in to

<sup>1</sup> Collected Poems by Robert Frost page 171



A GROUP OF LITERARY CHARACTERS

FROM MOUNTAIN INTERVAL

Most of the poems in *North of Boston*, as I have

already stated, are dramatic monologues dealing, for the most part, with characters against a stark background at some tragic moment of their lives. The division which follows, -- Mountain Interval, -- while it is much more lyrical, yet has, in its collection several poems about people, who, though not so impressive as those in *North of Boston*, are interesting and typical of the scene where in they are found. Their stories are not so fully told, but they are, nevertheless, vivid characters in a realistic background.

'Out, Out-' The first of these I shall speak of is the poem 'Out, Out-' -- only thirty-four lines in length -- the whole pathetic story. The man was working at the pump now in the yard on a Vermont farm, and the boy was doing his share. The day was almost over. The poet says that he wished they might have called it a day: it would have pleased the boy to have an extra half-hour (last word), and it would have averted the tragedy. Elsewhere had come out in that poem to call them in to

supper. Just at that moment, a sudden leap of the saw cut the boy's hand nearly off.

Then the boy saw all--  
Since he was old enough to know, big boy  
Doing a man's work, though a child at heart--  
He saw all spoiled. 'Don't let him cut my  
hand off--  
The doctor, when he comes, Don't let him,  
sister!'  
So. But the hand was gone already.  
The doctor put him in the dark of ether.<sup>1</sup>

Then those who were watching became frightened as they took the boy's pulse and listened at his heart which beat more and more faintly till the end.

And they, since they  
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

Brown's Descent      The second of these character sketches, in contrast to the preceding, is humorous: Brown's Descent. It is quite characteristic of Frost in its whimsical expression. The incident occurs after one of those freezing snow-storms when everything is encased in ice. Brown's farm was high up on a mountain-side. His lantern, when he did his chores on a mid-afternoon in winter, was a regular beacon to everyone for miles around. On this particular afternoon the gale got hold of him as he went from the house to the barn, and before he knew it he was sliding down over the icy crust. Stone walls and trees were buried, --there was nothing with which to stay his



supper. Just at that moment, a sudden knock of the new  
and the boy's hand nearly did.

Then the boy saw all--  
Since he was still young, he knew, his boy  
looking a certain way, showed a child's heart--  
He saw all together. 'Don't let him out of  
my hand yet--  
The doctor, when he comes, don't let him  
escape!  
No. But the hand was very steady.  
The doctor put him in the bed at once.

Then those who were watching became interested as  
they took the boy's pulse and listened at his heart.  
which was now and more faintly till the end.  
And they, when they  
were not the one dead, turned to their patients.

Brown's Legend The second of these character sketches,  
in contrast to the preceding, is humorous: Brown's Legend.  
It is quite characteristic of Frost in its whimsical  
expression. The incident occurs after one of those frost-  
and snow-storms when everything is encased in ice.  
Brown's farm was high up on a mountain-side. His father,  
when he did his chores one afternoon in winter, was  
a regular person to observe the little stream. On this  
particular afternoon the rain had held off and he went  
from the house to the barn, and before he knew it he was  
sliding down over the hay stacks. Stone walls and trees  
were distant,--there was nothing with which to stop his

downward progress. Frost draws the most ridiculous picture of the man.

He gained no foothold, but pursued  
His journey down from field to field.

Sometimes he came with arms outspread  
Like wings, revolving in the scene  
Upon his longer axis, and  
With no small dignity of mien. --

He never let the lantern drop  
And some exclaimed who saw afar  
The figures he described with it,  
'I wonder what those signals are

Brown makes at such an hour of night! <sup>1</sup>  
He's celebrating something strange!

And so he goes on in his willy-nilly descent, trying at first to save himself, and then giving it up, all the while holding the lantern which did not go out! When he finally reached the road, he looked back up the mountain to his farm, a matter of two miles, "bowed with grace to natural law, and took the long way home by road, a matter of several miles."<sup>2</sup>

The stolid dignity of the farmer, in spite of the ludicrous situation in which he finds himself, is cleverly brought out by the poet who exclaims

Yankees are what they always were. <sup>3</sup>

The Hill Wife      The next of these is The Hill Wife.

This poem is divided into sections called Loneliness,

1 Collected Poems of Robert Frost Page 173

2 Ibid Page 173

3 Ibid Page 173



downward progress. It was down the right side of the

picture of the man.

He gained no foothold, but turned  
his body down from the field.

Sometimes he came with arms outstretched  
like wings, revolving in the scene  
Upon the lower side, and  
With no small display of skill.

He never let the lantern drop  
And was explained to me later  
The figure he described with it,  
I wonder what those signs are

From which he took on hour of night:  
He's celebrating something strange!

And so he goes on in his willfully bizarre, trying

at first to save himself, and then giving it up, all the

while holding the lantern which did not go out. When he

finally reached the road, he looked back up the mountain

to his left, a matter of two miles, "bowed with grace

so natural, low, and took the long way home by road, a

matter of several miles."

The whole display of the farmer, in view of the

intense attention in which he takes himself, is

clearly brought out by the poet who explains

Yankees are what they always were.

The Bill Wile The next of these is The Bill Wile.

This poem is divided into sections called landmarks.

House Fear, The Smile, The Oft-Repeated Dream, and The Impulse. It tells the story of a young wife who is very lonely on her isolated hill farm. She is sad when the birds fly South, as they at least were some company for her.

She was always afraid to enter the lonely house at night when she and her husband had been off somewhere...

They learned to rattle the lock and key  
To give whatever might chance to be  
Warning and time to be off in flight.<sup>1</sup>

She fears the tramp to whom they gave bread,--his smile seemed to mock her; she feels as if he were watching somewhere from the woods. She dreaded a dream she often had of the dark pine tree outside their bedroom window.

Because she was so lonely-- she had no child-- and the place so remote, she had got into the habit of helping her husband in the field as he ploughed or cut down trees. Once she strayed so far from him that she scarcely heard when he called, and did not answer him. Then came the sudden overmastering impulse and she ran and hid.

He never found her, though he looked  
Everywhere,---

Sudden and swift and light as that  
The ties gave,  
And he learned of finalities  
Besides the grave.<sup>2</sup>





An Old Man's  
Winter Night

What an atmosphere of loneliness Frost contrives to give in this poem! The season is winter, it is night-time, bitter cold, the rooms of the house are empty save for the presence of the aged man who wanders about the silent place, lamp in hand. Only his clomping feet break the stillness. What are his thoughts? Finally he puts out the light and sleeps in the cold moonlight.

The log that shifted with a jolt  
Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted,  
And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept.  
One aged man -- one man can't fill a house,  
A farm, a countryside, or if he can,  
It's thus he does it of a winter night. <sup>1</sup>

The Gum-Gatherer The poet is overtaken on a mountain road by a man striding along down hill, and they get into conversation. The man is swinging a cotton bag wound partly around his hand. He had come from the woods higher up the mountain where he had a shack, stolen, the poet says,

Because of the fears of fire and loss  
That trouble the sleep of lumber folk:  
Visions of half the world turned black  
And the sun shrunken yellow in smoke. <sup>2</sup>

The man was a collector of spruce gum which he sold at the market in the town.

He showed me lumps of the scented stuff  
Like uncut jewels, dull and rough, <sup>3</sup>  
It comes to market golden brown,

The poet tells the gum-gatherer that he thinks the



in the night  
Winter night

What an atmosphere of loneliness there

contributes to give in this room! The

season is winter, it is night-like, bitter cold, the room

of the house are empty save for the presence of the aged

man who wanders about the silent place, limp in hand.

Only the chimney pipe breaks the stillness. What are the

thoughts? Finally he puts out the light and alone in the

darkness.

The day that shifted with a jolt  
Gave in the above, disturbed him and he shifted  
and eased his heavy breathing, but still night.  
One word now -- one word and it's all a house,  
a fact, a consolation, to be had,  
It's time he goes to a winter night.

The Sun-Collector The poet is overtaken on a mountain

road by a man striking along down hill, and they get into

conversation. The man is wearing a cotton bag round

partly around his head. He had come from the woods higher

up the mountain where he had a shack, stolen, the poet says,

because of the fear of fire and loss  
That tremble the sleep of lumber folk:  
Visions of half the world turned black  
and the sun stretched yellow in smoke.

The man was a collector of spices and which he said

at the market in the town.

He showed the lines of the ancient staff  
Like uncut jewels, dull and rough,  
It seemed to him that ancient times

The poet tells the sun-collector that he thinks the

latter must lead a pleasant life in the dimness underneath the trees, loosening the gum with his little knife, and carrying it down to market when he felt like it. Where but in Frost's New England forest would such a person be found today, I wonder. And who but Frost could write of such a simple and unpretentious person so delightfully! Amid the mass of gums on the market today, advertized so blatantly in public places, it is refreshing to turn to this resinous product of the woodlands, and if one, being an American, must chew it, to take the kind which "turns to pink between the teeth,"<sup>1</sup> and to do so in the dimness of the sweet-smelling forest where it grows!

Such characters as have been discussed in the foregoing pages are rooted in the New England soil, and of them Frost writes not as one who has observed them, but as Miss Lowell says, as "a man who has lived what he writes about."<sup>2</sup> He himself was close to the people he puts into his narratives; he has lived and worked among them.

#### OCCUPATIONS OF NEW ENGLAND COUNTRY LIFE

Mr. G. R. Elliott says "North of Boston is remarkable for its representations of the actual processes of human labor----To an extraordinary degree this poet has

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 176

2 Tendencies in Modern American Poetry Amy Lowell



latter must lead a pleasant life in the dinner parlors  
the trees, looking out the sun with the little birds, and  
country is down to market when he left the house. Where  
but in Frost's New England forest would such a person be  
found today, I wonder. And the poet Frost could write of  
such a simple and uneventful person as delightfully:  
And the mass of guts on the market today, advertised so  
obviously in public places, it is refreshing to turn to  
this rustic product of the wilderness, and it is, being  
an American, must show it, to take the kind which "there is  
pink between the teeth," and so do in the dinner of  
the sweet-smelling forest where it grows!

Good character as we have been discussed in the  
foregoing pages are copied in the New England soil, and  
of the Frost writes not as one who has observed them, but  
as a man who lives, as "a man who has lived what he writes  
about." He himself was close to the people he puts into  
his narratives; he has lived and worked among them.

#### CONTRASTS ON NEW ENGLAND RURAL LIFE

Mr. G. E. Elliott says "North of Boston is nearly  
all for the transportation of the annual produce of  
the farm. To an extraordinary degree this part has



taken part in labor--often with his hands and always with his spirit."<sup>1</sup> In a general survey of all the poems, the writer finds that Mr. Frost has taken part in all the familiar occupations that accompany farm life such as mowing, haying, berry-gathering, apple picking, maple sugar-making, bushing peas, mending stone walls, etc. In Mowing, as Miss Lowell says, only one who had actually performed the labor could speak so truly and picturesquely of the sound made by his scythe:

My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.<sup>2</sup>

Hay-making In The Death of the Hired Man we feel that it is Frost's own personal knowledge of the actual labor when he says of Silas's building a load of hay:--

He bundles every forkful in its place,  
And tags and numbers it for future reference  
So he can find and easily dislodge it  
In the unloading.--  
He takes it out in bunches like big birds' nests.  
You never see him standing on the hay  
He's trying to life, straining to lift himself.<sup>3</sup>

Hay-making occupies a prominent place in the lives of Frost's country characters. In the first division of his poems, A Boy's Will, alone, almost every poem has some reference to it. Ghost House has the line

The woods come back to the mowing field.<sup>4</sup>

A Late Walk again refers to the mowing field and "the headless aftermath."<sup>5</sup>

1 The Neighborliness of Robert Frost by G. R. Elliott  
2 Tendencies in Modern American Poetry by Amy Lowell  
3 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 49  
4 Ibid Page 6  
5 Ibid Page 11



taken part in labor--often with his hands and always  
with his spirit. In a general survey of all the poems,

the writer finds that Mr. Frost has taken part in all  
the familiar occupations that accompany farm life such  
as mowing, haying, berry-picking, apple picking, maple  
sugar-making, hogging corn, mending stone walls, etc.  
In haying, as Miss Lowell says, only one who had actually  
performed the labor could speak so truly and picturesquely  
of the sound made by his scythe:

My foot sweeps whisper and left the hay to make.

Hay-making In The Death of the Birch we find that

it is Frost's own personal knowledge of the actual labor  
when he says of Stiles's scythe a leaf of hay:--

He handles every forkful in its place,  
And taps and numbers it for future reference  
So he can find and easily describe it  
In the unending--  
He takes it out in mounds like tin dishes, heaves.  
You never see him standing on the hay  
He's trying to lift, straining to lift himself.

Hay-making occupies a prominent place in the lives

of Frost's country characters. In the first division of

his poems, A Boy's Will, alone, almost every poem has

some reference to it. Ghost Horses has the line

The woods come back to the mowing field.

A Late Walk again refers to the mowing field and "the

hundreds of horses."

Rose Pogonias<sup>1</sup> already referred to in preceding pages describes a sunny meadow where many orchises grew. These the poet hopes will be spared when mowing time arrives.

Waiting<sup>2</sup> opens with a lovely picture of a hay field in the moonlight.

What things for dreams there are when spectre-like  
Moving among tall hay cocks lightly piled,  
I enter upon the stubble field,  
From which the laborers' voices late have died,  
And in the antiphony of afterglow  
And rising full moon, sit me down  
Upon the full moon's side of the first haycock  
And lose myself amid so many alike.

Mowing<sup>3</sup> ends with these lines descriptive of an experience which this farmer-poet had had, evidently, many times.

The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.  
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

The Tuft of Flowers<sup>4</sup> not only depicts the poet at his task of mowing, and all the sights and sounds of that summer morning in the fields, but brings out the feeling of a common labor among men by his seeing a tuft of vivid bloom beside the brook, which he who had been mowing earlier before sunrise had spared. The poet feels

..... A spirit kindred to my own;  
So that henceforth I worked no more alone.....

And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech  
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 19

2 Ibid Page 20

3 Ibid Page 25

4 Ibid Page 31



Howe Porter <sup>1</sup> already referred to in preceding

pages described a sunny meadow where many orchards grew.

These the poet hopes will be spared when modern times

arrives.

Waiting <sup>2</sup> opens with a lovely picture of a day when

in the moonlight.

What things for dreams there are when quietude-like  
Moving among tall bay bushes lightly filled,  
I enter upon the staid life,  
From which the laborer's voice late have fled,  
And in the antiphony of afterglow  
And rising full moon, sit me down  
Upon the hill moon's side of the first meadow  
And lose myself with so many others.

Mowing <sup>3</sup> ends with these lines descriptive of an ex-

perience which the farmer-poet had had, evidently, many

times.

The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.  
My labor says the wisest and best the day to  
make.

The Tally of Mowers <sup>4</sup> not only denotes the poet at

his task of mowing, and all the sights and sounds of that

summer morning in the fields, but brings out the feeling

of a common labor among men by his seeing a tale of vivid

pleasure beside the work, which he who has been mowing

earlier mowers shared and shared. The poet feels

..... A spirit kindred to my own;

So that heartily I worked no more alone.....

And remember, as it were, self brotherly speech  
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.

I collected poems by Robert Frost from 19

2 Ibid Page 20

3 Ibid Page 21

4 Ibid Page 21

'Men work together,' I told him from the heart,  
'Whether they work together or apart.'

Berry-picking      In Blueberries<sup>1</sup> the poet describes picking berries in a field warm with sunshine when he and his companion "Sank out of sight like trolls underground," and picked until he had lost sight of her in wandering farther afield, and lifted up his voice only to find that she was near at hand. We note the exactness of his observation in these lines:

It must be on charcoal they fatten their fruit.  
I taste in them sometimes the flavour of soot.  
And after all really they're ebony skinned:  
The blue's but a mist from the breath of the wind,<sup>2</sup>  
A tarnish that goes at a touch of the hand.

Apple-picking      After Apple-Picking<sup>3</sup> is one of the most perfect of Frost's poems of labor, filled with true and striking pictures as it is, and expressing so simply and yet forcefully the poet's weariness at the end of the job. From the first mention of the "two-pointed ladder sticking through a tree toward heaven" through all the appeal to the senses of sight, smell, and sound, the vision of russet fruit, the "scent of apples," "the rumbling of load on load into the cellar bin," we have lived with the poet through his harvest of the crop.

Maple Sugar  
Making

In the last line of one of his poems<sup>4</sup>  
the poet tells us that he is living in

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 78  
2 Ibid Page 78  
3 Ibid Page 88  
4 Ibid Page 199



'Then work together,' I told him from the heart,  
'Whether they work together or apart.'

Berry-picking      In Apple-blossom      the poet describes dis-

the berries in a field with sunshine when he and his  
companion "stare out at night like trolls underground,"  
and picked until he had lost sight of her in wandering  
further afield, and lifted up his voice only to find that  
she was near at hand. We note the sweetness of his  
observation in these lines:

It must be an orchard they gather their fruit.  
I taste in these blossoms the flavour of food.  
And after all, really, they're abnormally  
The blue's not a bit from the presence of the wind.  
A rumour that goes at a touch of the hand.

Apple-blossom      After Apple-blossom      's one of the most

perfect of Frost's poems of labor, filled with true and  
striking pictures as it is, and expressing so simply and  
yet forcefully the poet's weariness at the end of the job.  
From the first mention of the "two-pointed ladder" climbing  
through a tree toward heaven" through all the appeal to  
the senses of sight, smell, and sound, the vision of transient  
fruit, the "scent of apples," "the rustling of food on  
food into the cellar bin," we have lived with the poet  
through his harvest of the crop.

Apple-blossom      In the last line of one of his poems  
the poet tells us that he is living in

Vermont. That being the case, he must have been familiar with the process of making maple sugar. In his poem Evening in a Sugar Orchard,<sup>1</sup> he briefly describes the scent outside a sugar-house one March night when

The moon, though slight, was moon enough to show  
On every tree a bucket with a lid.

It is not in this case, however, the sugar-making that interests the poet so much as the sparks from the chimney of the sugar-house among the bare boughs of the maple trees.

Another reference to this industry is found in the poem, Maple.<sup>2</sup>

..... the maples  
Stood uniform in buckets, and the steam  
Of sap and snow rolled off the sugar house.

Farming Robert Frost says in one of his poems,

Well, if I have to choose --  
I choose to be a plain New Hampshire farmer.<sup>3</sup>

There is no part of farming that he had not engaged in with his own hands, as we may discover from reading his poetry, alone, -- from spring planting to autumn harvesting. In Putting in the Seed,<sup>4</sup> who but the poet could suggest the first growth with so few words:

The sturdy seedling with arched body comes  
Shouldering its way and shedding the earth crumbs.

In Pea Brush,<sup>5</sup> he is looking over birch boughs in

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 289

2 Ibid Page 222

3 Ibid Page 199

4 Ibid Page 155

5 Ibid Page 154



Verdant. That being so, he must have been familiar

with the process of making people's work. In his poem

Evening in a Sugar Orchard,<sup>1</sup> he briefly describes the

scene outside a sugar-house one night when

The moon, though almost, was moon enough to show

On every tree a hundred white-lids.

It is not in this case, however, the sugar-making

that interests the poet so much as the aspect from the

obscure of the sugar-house among the bare branches of the

apple trees.

Another reference to this industry is found in the

poem, Apple.<sup>2</sup>

.... the apples

Stood uniform in whiteness, and the stems  
Of sap and suns rolled off the sugar houses.

Parables Robert Frost says in one of his poems,

Well, if I have to choose --

I choose to be a plain New Hampshire farmer.

There is no part of farming that he had not engaged

in with his own hands, as we may discover from reading

his poetry, where -- from spring planting to autumn

harvesting. In Parables in the Snow,<sup>3</sup> who but the poet

could suggest such lines: growth with so few words:

The sturdy seedling with shined body comes  
Shouldering its way and shading the earth around.

In The Grass,<sup>4</sup> he is looking over a field where in

<sup>1</sup> Collected Poems of Robert Frost, Page 207

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Page 127

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Page 192

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Page 123

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Page 124

a clearing to select some for bushing his peas.

1

In The Star-Splitter, in two lines, the stoniness of a New England farm is made clear.

....He moved the rocks to plow the ground  
And plowed between the rocks he couldn't move.

2

In Gathering Leaves the poet has brought us round to the autumn season:

I make a great noise  
Of rustling all day  
Like rabbit and deer  
Running away.---

Next to nothing for use.  
But a crop is a crop,  
And who's to say where  
The harvest shall stop?

With the coming on of winter, the poet says good-bye to his orchard in one of the most whimsical of his poems, Good-Bye and Keep Cold.<sup>3</sup> He thinks of all that can happen to the young trees during the winter: hungry animals nibbling the bark and weather that is too mild.

No orchard's the worse for the wintriest storm;  
But one thing about it, it mustn't get warm.  
How often already you've had to be told,  
Keep cold, young orchard. Good-bye and keep cold.

This poem closes with the lovely line of faith

But something has to be left to God.

In addition to his numerous complete poems on some phase of farm labor, we discover many brief but telling phrases showing his knowledge of all the details of these

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 218

2 Ibid Page 290

3 Ibid Page 281



a clearing to select some for planting his trees.

I

In the West-End, in the lines, the atmosphere

of a New England town is made clear.

...He moved the rocks to show the ground  
And showed between the rocks he couldn't move.

2

In Robert's Letter the poet has brought us round

to the natural season:

I have a great desire  
Of trusting all day  
To the rocks and trees  
Hanging away.

Not to nothing for me.  
But to stay in a group,  
And who's to say where  
The harvest shall stay?

With the coming of winter, the poet says:

He to his orchard in one of the most beautiful of his

3

poems, Good-bye and Good-bye. He thinks of all that has

happened to him since the winter: "Winter"

is a poem about the dark and weather that is so stiff.

No one's to blame for the winter's end;  
But one thing about it, it mustn't get worse.  
How often already you've had to be told,  
Keep cold, your friends. Good-bye and keep cold.

This poem closes with the lovely line of faith:

But something has to be left to God.

In addition to his numerous complete poems on these

themes of love, labor, we discover many other but telling

phrases showing his knowledge of all the details of these

country occupations. In The Black Cottage, it is the "tar banded ancient cherry trees;" in Brown's Descent, it is doing the evening chores; in The Investment, it is digging potatoes; in The Grindstone, he says

These hands have helped it go.

In The Axe-Helve, he is working at the chopping-block; in 'Out, Out--', it is sawing sticks of wood for the stove; in A Girl's Garden, it is wheeling a barrow load of dung; in A Time to Talk, it is hoeing; in Birches, it is going to fetch the cows; in The Housekeeper, it is holding the hens together upside down by the legs; in A Servant to Servants, it is care of the highways; in The Death of the Hired Man, it is finding water with a hazel rod; in Storm Fear, it is drifts piled high in dooryard and road which must later be broken out. To one born and reared in the country, these tasks form the daily, common round, but in the poet's words they take on a new dignity and beauty. There is not one of them but has its homely charm for him.

#### NEW ENGLAND BACKGROUND IN

#### COLLOQUIAL EXPRESSION

The New England background of the poet is as evident in his choice of words and turns of expression, as in country dialects, and now the people talk in those parts.



country accordingly. In the Black Country, it is the  
"far famed ancient cherry street" in Bury's legend;  
it is being the evening street; in the legend, it is  
divine nature: in the legend, it is  
These things have helped it go.  
In the legend, he is working at the cherry-blossom;  
in the legend, it is a scene of wood for the street;  
in the legend, it is a scene of a narrow road of wood;  
in the legend, it is a scene of a narrow road of wood;  
to take the scene; in the legend, it is a scene of  
have a scene of a scene; in the legend, it is a scene of  
scene, it is a scene of the legend; in the legend, it is  
scene, it is a scene of a scene; in the legend, it is  
scene, it is a scene of a scene; in the legend, it is  
most later be proved out. To one side and round in the  
country, these things show the scene, scene scene, but in  
the scene's words they take on a new scene and scene.  
There is not one of them but see the scene scene scene.

#### THE NEW ENGLAND BACKGROUND

#### COLLUSION EXTENSION

The New England background of the scene is an evi-  
dent in the scene of scene and scene of scene, as in

the natural background which he delineates. Although he does not use dialect, as such, the dramatic monologues and idyls, "written in a conversational blank verse," says Louis Untermeyer, "establish the connection between the vernacular and the language of literature."<sup>1</sup> His poems have what the critic just referred to calls a "talk-flavored tone", and this tone is typically that of the New England country districts in words and colloquial expressions, in spite of Miss Lowell's opinion to the contrary. She says, "I find his people untrue to type in one important particular. In none of them do we find that pungency of thought and expression which is so ingrained in the New England temper. Characters and situations impress him, speech does not. It is probably for this reason that he uses no dialect in these poems. New England turns of speech would lose much of their raciness without the peculiar pronunciation which accompanies them. It speaks marvellously for the vividness of the poet's work in other ways that it is still personal and particular with this element of local speech left out."<sup>2</sup> The writer of the present thesis is amazed at this statement of Miss Lowell's with which she most strongly disagrees, wondering if that lady really knew New England country districts, and how the people talk in those parts.

1 Modern American Poetry by Louis Untermeyer Page 254

2 Tendencies in Modern American Poetry by Amy Lowell



the natural background which he believes. Although  
he does not use dialect, as such, the dramatic monologues  
and lyrics, "written in a conversational plain verse,"  
saye Louis Untermeyer, "establish the connection between  
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poems have what the critic just referred to calls a  
"half-literate tone", and this tone is probably that  
of the New England country dialect in words and col-  
loquial expressions, in spite of Miss Lowell's opinion to  
the contrary. She says, "I find his people native to  
type in one important particular. In none of them do we  
find that language of thought and expression which is so  
intrinsic to the New England temper. Characteristic and  
situation impress him, speech does not. It is probably  
for this reason that he uses no dialect in these poems.  
New England turns of speech would lose much of their  
reasons without the peculiar pronunciation which accompanies  
them. It speaks powerfully for the vividness of the  
poet's work in other ways that it is still vernacular and  
particular with this element of local speech left out."  
The writer of the present thesis is amazed at this state-  
ment of Miss Lowell's with which she most strongly dis-  
agrees, wondering if that lady really knew New England  
country dialect, and how the people talk in those parts.

Perhaps with her scholarly background, and her life in Cambridge and abroad, Miss Lowell had come in contact with very few of such people as Frost describes, and did not realize how many of his expressions are directly attributable to their habit of speech. In at least one of the poems, Brown's Descent,<sup>1</sup> we have real dialect in that character's terse remark at the end: "He's 'bout out!" While this is a very rare example, and illustrations of dialect are scarce in Frost's work, it is not so in regard to New England turns of expression, or those pungent colloquialisms which anyone familiar with New England life would recognize at once. The Housekeeper<sup>2</sup> has a number of such expressions. This is a dramatic monologue in which the speaker, a huge helpless woman, as far as walking is concerned, is telling her visitor about the affairs of her daughter Estelle who has just run off from John with whom she has been living in an unmarried state for fifteen years. Here are some of her New England turns of expression:--

All is, he's made up his mind not to stand, etc.  
The dear knows my interest has been, etc.  
Reach me down the little tin box, etc.  
I didn't relish it along at first.....

Again in The Generations of Men<sup>3</sup> the poet represents Granny Stark as speaking in dialect: "I dunnow; mebbe I'm wrong; there's a dote too many of them; there ain't no

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 173  
2 Ibid Page 103  
3 Ibid Page 94



perhaps with her scholarly background, and her life is  
Christian and virtuous. Mrs. Lowell had come in contact with  
very few of such people as Frost described, and this may  
explain how many of his expressions are directly attributed  
to his habit of speech. In at least one of the poems

Brown's Heron, we have two distinct in that character's  
terms beneath of the end: "I'll 'out' you!" While this is  
a very rare example, and illustrations of dialect are  
scarcely in Frost's work, it is not so in regard to the  
English forms of expression, or those current colloquialisms  
which anyone familiar with New England life would recognize  
as such. The Housekeeper<sup>2</sup> has a number of such expressions.

This is a dramatic monologue in which the speaker, a lady  
religious woman, as far as we can tell, is talking  
and visiting about the affairs of her daughter Estelle who  
has just run off from home with whom she has been living  
in an unmarried state for fifteen years. Here are some  
of her New England turns of expression:

All is, he's made up his mind not to marry, etc.  
The best thing my interest has been, etc.  
Reach me how the little tin box, etc.  
I didn't believe it would be like that....

Again in The Conversation of Mr. and Mrs. Lowell<sup>3</sup>  
Granny Burt is speaking in dialect: "I dunno; maybe I's  
wrong; there's a size too many of them; there ain't no

names quite like the old ones. The title, Grandsir Stark, is used. The writer having always lived in Massachusetts, was unfamiliar with this form until she first visited New Hampshire.

There is not only some dialect in The Pauper Witch of Grafton,<sup>1</sup> but many colloquialisms appear:

To let on he was plagued to death with me----.

All is, if I'd a-known when I was young---.

To make so free and kick up in folks' faces---.

In The Death of the Hired Man<sup>2</sup> we find the old expression to "be beholden" to anyone; a "likely lad"; "to keep well out of earshot".

In A Hundred Collars<sup>3</sup> Lufe says, "Just as you say;" "I'll knock so-fashion"; "I don't want you should shoot me."

In Home-Burial<sup>4</sup> the husband says

I'd bind myself to keep hands off  
Anything special you're a-mind to name.

In Blueberries<sup>5</sup> Loren is represented as saying

"I have left those there berries."

In The Self-Seeker<sup>6</sup> we find

To pay the doctor's bill and tide me over.

In A Girl's Garden:<sup>7</sup>

To put some strength  
On your slim-jim arm.

In Brown's Descent,<sup>8</sup> already referred to for dialect, we have the expressions "cross lots"; "our stock was

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 252

2 Ibid page 49

6 Ibid page 117

3 Ibid page 61

7 Ibid page 167

4 Ibid page 69

8 Ibid page 173

5 Ibid page 78



names quite like the old ones. The first, Grandfather  
is used. The writer having always lived in  
Massachusetts, was familiar with the name. Still she  
first visited New Hampshire.  
There is not only a place named in the former with  
of Grandfather, but many other names appear:  
To let us be more specific to learn with us  
all is, it is known when I was young--  
To make no tree and look at its looks, trees--  
In the south of the first we find the old ex-  
pression to "the children" to say; a "living" and "to  
keep well out of each other."  
In a second Colony late says, "Just as you say."  
"I'll make no mistake"; "I don't want you should about it."  
In third Parish the husband says  
I'd like myself to keep hands off  
anything special you're a-coming to home.  
In fourth town is represented as saying  
"I have left home there before."  
In the Self-Booker we find  
To say the doctor's bill and take me over.  
In a girl's book:  
To see some strength  
On your side--the end.  
In Woman's Journal, already referred to for Grandfather,  
we have the expressions "Grandfather"; "Grandfather";

1	Collected from by Robert Frost	page 127
2	Idiosyncrasy	page 127
3	Idiosyncrasy	page 127
4	Idiosyncrasy	page 127
5	Idiosyncrasy	page 127
6	Idiosyncrasy	page 127
7	Idiosyncrasy	page 127
8	Idiosyncrasy	page 127
9	Idiosyncrasy	page 127
10	Idiosyncrasy	page 127

petered out".

In Snow<sup>1</sup> we find "the whole to-do seems to have been for nothing."

In The Code,<sup>2</sup> the word "jag" is used for a load of hay. This word is marked dialectic or colloquial in Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.

A stone-boat referred to in the poem A Star in a Stone-Boat<sup>3</sup> was an entirely unfamiliar expression to the writer until she saw last June in the newspaper<sup>4</sup> an article on a first report of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, being compiled under the direction of Professor Hans Kurath of Brown University. In the article, which gave a number of New England expressions, the word "stone-boat", used in Western New England, was listed as a primitive vehicle for taking stones from the fields, while in Eastern Massachusetts it is a "drag". Evidently in New Hampshire and Vermont where the poet has lived, the former expression was common, while to the writer, brought up in Eastern Massachusetts, the latter is the only term with which she is familiar.

In Mending Wall<sup>5</sup> we find the expression

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down.

This seems to be a New England colloquialism similar to

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 180

2 Ibid Page 90

3 Ibid Page 213

4 The Boston Globe - June 2, 1932

5 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 47



reported out".  
In Stone we find "the whole so-to-speak to have been  
for nothing."

In The Body, the word "log" is used for a load of  
hay. This word is written dialectic or colloquial in

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.  
A stone-dome referred to in the poem A Stone is a

Stone-Dome was an entirely unfamiliar expression to the  
writer until the new issue of the newspaper in  
article on a first report of the Icelandic Affairs of the  
United States and Canada, being compiled under the direction

of Professor Hans Kristof of Brown University. In the  
article, which gave a number of New England expressions,  
the word "stone-dome", used in Eastern New England, was  
listed as a primitive verb for to be a stone from the  
field, while in Eastern Massachusetts it is a "dome".

Evidently in New England and Vermont where the word has  
lived, the former expression was common, while in the  
writer, brought up in Eastern Massachusetts, the latter is  
the only form which was familiar.

In Island we find the expression  
Somewhere there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That's what it does.

This seems to be a New England colloquialism similar to

"the cat wants out", which the writer has heard used by old-fashioned poeple, although she has been told that it is also common in Pennsylvania.

Of dialectic expressions selected at random from the poems, a long list might be made up as follows:--  
the lay of different farms; dooryard; he wa'nt kept watch of; a catch-all full of attic clutter; Len took the notion; I'd seen enough of his bulling tricks; he looked so clean disgusted; he's got hay down; clomping off; not a mite worse; life's ironing-out; a strapping girl; and kiting about.

A colloquial exclamation used by the poet a number of times in his conversational poems is the dear knows,  
which is found in <sup>1</sup>Snow, <sup>2</sup>The Housekeeper, and The Rose  
Family.<sup>3</sup> "Sakes", as an exclamation, appears in The Runaway.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Percy H. Boynton, in referring to Frost's people and their speech says, "Such people are not to be found only in New England. Similar conditions produce the same type anywhere in Anglo-Saxondom; but their characters are like their speech which has the general features of the English tongue, with a local twang and idiom. And Mr. Frost has fixed them in his pictures."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 181

<sup>2</sup> Ibid page 106

<sup>3</sup> Ibid page 305

<sup>4</sup> Ibid page 273

<sup>5</sup> Some Contemporary Americans by Percy H. Boynton page 45



"the end was out", which the writer has heard used by  
old-fashioned people, although she has been told that it  
is also common in Pennsylvania.

Of dialectic expressions selected at random from

the poems, a long list might be made as follows:--

the lay of different tames; dearly; he wasn't kept watch  
of; a catch-all (all) of settles winter; let look the notion;  
I'd seen enough of his belly tricks; he looked so clean  
disputed; he's not new down; alarming off; not a side  
worse; like's trousing-out; a strapping bird; and elting  
about.

A colloquial exclamation used by the poet a number

of times in his conversational poems is the best known,  
which is found in How, The Unpleasant, and The Rose.  
Really, "Gee", as an exclamation, appears in The Runaway.

Mr. Percy H. Boynton, in referring to How says:

people and their speech says, "Such people are not to be  
found only in the English. Similar conditions produce the  
same type wherever it exists; but their characters  
are like their speech which has the general features of the  
English tongue, with a local twist and idiom. And it  
is not new like them in his picture."

CURRENT CRITICISMS: FROST'S PLACE IN

AMERICAN LITERATURE

Louis Untermeyer says, "The long poems (the 'notes') in New Hampshire rank with the narrative monologs in North of Boston; the 'grace notes' contain not merely Frost's finest lines but some of the most haunting lyrics ever written by an American."<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note Mr. Untermeyer's use of the word, "haunting", in this connection, and to compare it with another critic's tribute to the beauty of Frost's verse: "one of the surest tests of fine art is whether our imagination harks back to it, fascinated in after contemplation, or whether our interest is suddenly exhausted both in it and the subject."<sup>2</sup> One who has read Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,<sup>3</sup> The Runaway,<sup>4</sup> Birches,<sup>5</sup> will have had his imagination so captivated, and will return to them again and again. Mr. Edward Garnett, in reference to North of Boston says, "The first lines of the book are stamped with the magic of style: a style that obeys its own laws of grace and beauty and inner harmony."<sup>6</sup>

Any reader of Frost must have been frequently reminded of Wordsworth in the type of subject each writes of, and his feeling for people, natural scenery, and earthly labors in

1 Modern American Poetry Page 255  
2 A New American Poet by Edward Garnett  
3 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 273  
4 Ibid page 273  
5 Ibid page 152 6 Ibid (note 1)



CURRENT CRITICISM: POETRY'S PLACE IN

AMERICAN LITERATURE

John Untermeyer says, "The long poems (the 'notes')"

in New Englanders rank with the narrative monologues in  
North of Boston; the 'spare poems' contain not merely  
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in the beauty of Frost's verse: "one of the sweetest tests of  
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reminded in after contemplation, or whether our interest  
is suddenly exhausted both in it and the subject."<sup>2</sup> One  
who has read Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,<sup>3</sup>  
The Runaway, Birches,<sup>4</sup> will have had his imagination so  
captivated, and will return to them again and again. It.  
Edward Gossell, in reference to North of Boston says, "The  
first lines of the book are stamped with the magic of  
style: a style that weaves its own laws of grace and beauty  
and inner harmony."<sup>5</sup>

Any reader of Frost must have been frequently reminded  
of Wordsworth in the type of subject each writer of, and his  
feeling for people, natural scenery, and earthly labors in

1 Modern American Poetry, page 235  
2 A New American Poet by Edward Gossell  
3 Collected Poems by Robert Frost, page 273  
4 Ibid, page 277  
5 Ibid, page 228 & 234 (note 1)

his immediate locality. "Frost's devotion to the intimacies of earth is, even more than Wordsworth's, rich, almost inordinate in its fidelity; what his emotion (or his poetry) may lack in windy range, is trebly compensated for by its untroubled depths."<sup>1</sup>

Another recent critic says, "The likeness between him (Frost) and Wordsworth is obvious. The close comparison does not fail to bring out the virtues of the American poet. He never blazes with immortal fire as Wordsworth did on certain miraculous days. He is a subtler and more constantly just; his blank-verse narratives and dialogues, though none approaches the naked grandeur of Michael, are closer to the exact life of the folk for whom he speaks. He is more even in accomplishment. His trafficking with grandeur is rare, but his dealing with nature, while it never flashes into Wordsworthian rapture, has a constant closeness and quiet magic."<sup>2</sup>

Miss Lowell says of Frost, "How deftly he draws a background. - - - The secret of his success - - - lies in his accurate observation coupled with a perfect simplicity of phrase; the latter an inheritance from a race brought up on the English Bible. He tells what he has seen exactly as he has seen it. His words are simple, straightforward, direct, manly, and there is an elemental quality in all he

1 Modern American Poetry by Untermeyer Page 256

2 Expression in America by Ludwig Lewisohn Page 497



his immediate locality. "Trost's devotion to the intimacies of earth is, even more than Wordsworth's, rich, almost inordinate in its fidelity; what his emotion for his poetry may lack in windy range, is trebly compensated for by its untroubled depths." I

Another reason, critics say, "the likeness between him (Trost) and Wordsworth is obvious. The close comparison does not fail to bring out the virtues of the American poet. He never mixes with immortal things as Wordsworth did on certain misty days. He is a realist and more constant in just; his blank-verse narratives and dialogues, though none approaches the naked grandeur of Michael, are closer to the exact life of the folk for whom he speaks. He is more even in accomplishment. His tramping with grandeur is rare, but his dealing with nature, while it never flashes into Wordsworthian rapture, has a constant closeness and quiet magic." 2

Miss Lowell says of Trost, "How deeply he draws a background. . . . The secret of his success . . . lies in his accurate observation coupled with a perfect sensitivity of hearing; the latter an inheritance from a race proud up on the English hills. He feels what he has seen exactly as he has seen it. His words are simple, straightforward, direct, manly, and there is an elemental quality in all he



does which would surely be lost if he chose to pursue  
niceties of expression."<sup>1</sup>

As an illustration of the "accurate observation  
coupled with a perfect simplicity of phrase" we might  
take the following from The Black Cottage.

We chanced in passing by that afternoon  
To catch it in a sort of special picture  
Among tar-banded ancient cherry trees,  
Set well back from the road in rank lodged grass,  
The little cottage we were speaking of,  
A front with just a door between two windows,<sup>2</sup>  
Fresh painted by the shower a velvet black.

Again in Blue-Butterfly Day Frost writes of these  
lovely little creatures:

But these are flowers that fly and all but sing:  
And now from having ridden out desire  
They lie closed over in the wind and cling<sup>3</sup>  
Where wheels have freshly sliced the April mire.

The exactness of observation, and the Anglo-Saxon  
origin of words are striking in this selection, partic-  
ularly the last two lines. Miss Lowell, in continuing her  
critique of Frost's work states that he has "gained  
success in his chosen field but his canvas is exceedingly  
small, and no matter how wonderfully he paints upon it,  
he cannot attain to the position held by men with a wider  
range of vision - - - . Mr. Frost's work is undoubtedly  
more finished in its kind than the work of any other living  
American poet, but his very finish precludes growth."<sup>4</sup>

1 Tendencies in Modern American Poetry by Amy Lowell

2 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 74

3 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 277

4 Tendencies in Modern American Poetry by Amy Lowell



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niceties of expression."

As an illustration of the "accurate observation  
coupled with a perfect simplicity of phrase" we might  
take the following from The Black Cottage.

We observed in passing by that afternoon  
To catch it in a sort of special picture  
Among the shaded ancient cherry trees,  
Get well back from the road in such a quiet place,  
The little cottage we were seeking of,  
A front with a door between two windows,  
Fresh painted by the shower a velvet black.

Again in Blue-Butterfly Day Frost writes of these

lovely little creatures:

But these are flowers that fly and all but stir;  
And now from having ridden out desire  
They lie closed over in the wind and cling  
Those wheels have freshly alighted the April mite.

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I Translated in Modern American Poetry by Miss Lowell  
2 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 74  
3 Collected Poems by Robert Frost Page 87  
4 Translated in Modern American Poetry by Miss Lowell

Of course this statement of Miss Lowell's was written more than fifteen years ago, before any of Frost's more recent volumes. Mr. Untermeyer would seem to differ with the former critic in his statement regarding Frost published as late as 1931: "The ripe repose, the banked passions, the nicely blended tenderness and humor are everywhere. Here neighborliness is universalized and localism is a province of humanity."<sup>1</sup>

The realism of Frost's poetry is obvious on a first reading: he writes of places and characters with which he was perfectly familiar, and whom he must have loved or he could not have written about them so vividly and tenderly. The poem New Hampshire<sup>2</sup> is filled with realistic allusions to such places as Berlin, Colebrook, Manchester, Littleton, Franconia; and to people whom we all recognize at once: - Hughes, Wilson, Bryan, Lincoln, Lafayette, Matthew Arnold. Frost himself once said, "There are two types of realist -- the one who offers a good deal of dirt with his potato to show that it is a real one; and the one who is satisfied with the potatoes brushed clean. I'm inclined to be the second kind..... To me, the thing art does for life is to clean it, to strip it to form."<sup>3</sup>

Of his realism Miss Lowell says, "Mr. Frost is realism touched to fire by idealization, but in the final

1 Modern American Poetry by L. Untermeyer

2 Collected Poems by Robert Frost page 199

3 Modern American Poetry by Untermeyer



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Of his realism Miss Lowell says, "Mr. Frost is  
realism touched to fire by identification, but in the final

count, and in spite of its great beauty, it remains realism--no such rare imaginative bursts from him as Masefield gives us time and again. Mr. Frost writes down exactly what he sees. But, being a true poet, he sees it vividly and with a charm which translates itself into a beautiful simplicity of expression.....He wins first by his gentle understanding, and his strong and unsentimental power of emotion; later, we are conquered by his force, and moved to admiration by his almost unapproachable technique. Still, his imagination is bounded by his life -- and bent all one way like the wind-blown trees of New England hillsides. After all, art is rooted in the soil, and only the very greatest men can be both cosmopolitan and great. Mr. Frost is as New England as Burns is Scotch, Synge Irish, or Mistral Provencal, and it is perhaps not too much to say that he is the equal of these poets, and will so rank to future generations."<sup>1</sup>

The English critic, Mr. Edward Garnett, points out that Mr. Frost has the gift of style,<sup>2</sup> and Miss Lowell considers that "in the final count, it is always this fact of style which makes the glory of a work of art and keeps it alive."<sup>3</sup>

A more modern critic, Ludwig Lewisohn, in referring to Frost's style, says "Frost belongs to the movement of naturalistic revolt--the peasant, truly close to the land,

1 Tendencies in Modern American Poetry by A. Lowell

2 Ibid

3 Ibid



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1 Londoner in Modern American Poetry by A. Lowell  
 2 Ibid  
 3 Ibid



the folk and hence to the forces that create fundamental tradition is unswerving from the first in his adherence to the eternal necessities of form, desirous only of cleansing form from accidental dross and temporary worthless accretions."<sup>1</sup>

Again this same critic writes, "Frost's revolt against convention in both substance and form may be called the classical revolt, for it is the recurrently necessary return from artifice to expression, from accepted falsehoods to veracity, from fashions to nature..its aim is to recover the freshness of the permanent."<sup>2</sup>

Sidney Cox, Frost's biographer, in speaking of the poet says, "Frost never talks of loving nature. He has been too much a plain New Hampshire farmer not to have experienced beyond forgetting how much our relations with her are a warfare."<sup>3</sup>

Edith Wharton in her preface to Ethan Frome expresses something of this same idea of the warfare with nature in New England. "I had an uneasy sense that the New England of fiction bore little except a vague botanical and dialectical resemblance to the harsh and beautiful land as I had seen it. Even the abundant enumeration of sweet-fern, asters, and mountain laurel, and the conscientious reproduction of the vernacular, left me with the feeling that the out

1 Expression in America by L. Lewisohn Page 493

2 Ibid Page 497

3 Robert Frost by Sidney Cox



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tion of the vernacular, left me with the feeling that the

cropping granite had in both cases been overlooked."<sup>1</sup>

Frost never makes the mistake of overlooking the granite.

Mr. Cox goes on to say of the people in Frost's nature poems, "He is interested in people a little odd in soul or circumstance, whom he has known and sympathized with, in characteristics not well known because they are shades harder to see than heroism or generosity, and in ordinary situations that involve queer, unliterary mixtures of emotion ----. The very sound of his poems is true."<sup>2</sup>

In concluding this evaluation of Robert Frost's work by contemporary writers, this statement from Lewisohn seems to be an excellent summing up of the poet's power. "He is at best when from phenomena in life and nature---- he wrings a meaning which is both personal and universal, concrete and therefore general. Lucidity and emotional depth ---- these are indeed Frost's great qualities----. Frost is evidently no minor poet, and the naturalistic revolt in American letters has produced nothing that savors more of the permanent than his best work. And this is so because he addressed himself to the permanent and sought life's meaning there."<sup>3</sup>

1 Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton  
2 Robert Frost by Sidney Cox  
3 Expression in America by Ludwig Lewisohn



profoundly grateful and in both cases overlooked."

Frost never makes the mistake of overlooking the creative.

Mr. Fox goes on to say of the people in Frost's  
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situations that involve quiet, unobtrusive mixture of  
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In concluding this evaluation of Robert Frost's  
work by creative writers, this statement from Leavitt  
seems to be an excellent example of the poet's power.

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none of the permanent than his best work. And this is no  
because he addressed himself to the permanent and sought  
life's meaning there."

SUMMARY

We have seen from the foregoing study of Robert Frost and his work that he is a typical poet of rural New England; he is a voice speaking realistically and yet with artistry of the locality in which he has lived for the greater part of his life, and of a people for whom he feels evident sympathy and affection. Although born in California and living there for the first years of his life, it is not of these early experiences that he writes; nor does he use his English experiences in any of his poems except possibly the one To E.T.<sup>1</sup> dedicated to the memory of his English soldier friend who fell in the World War. While among the lanes of Gloucestershire, he brought out books of poetry speaking of the very soil of his beloved New England countryside; he remained untouched, apparently, by anything outside the homeland.

Nature Lover We have seen that Frost is a lover of nature, but that his affection is entirely unsentimental, and is based on an observation of natural phenomena which is accurate and keen: that he knows nature at all seasons of the year and in all her moods. Here again, however, it is nature as he observes it in the New England districts, and nowhere else. His poems we



REMARKS

We have seen from the foregoing study of Robert Frost and his work that he is a typical poet of rural New England; he is a realist speaking realistically and yet with sensitivity of the locality in which he has lived for the greater part of his life, and of a people for whom he feels evident sympathy and affection. Although born in California and living there for the first years of his life, it is not of these early experiences that he writes; nor does he use his English experiences in any of his poems except possibly the one to E.T. <sup>I</sup> dedicated to the memory of his English soldier friend who fell in the World War. While among the ruins of Gloucestershire, he brought out books of poetry speaking of the very soil of his beloved New England countryside; he was not detached, objectively, or anything outside the homeland.

Nature Lover We have seen that Frost is a lover of nature, but that his affection is entirely naturalistic, and is based on an observation of natural phenomena which is accurate and keen: that he does not write at all seasons of the year and in all new moods. Here again, however, it is nature as he observes it in the New England landscape, and nowhere else. His poems to

have found to be filled with beautiful descriptions of singing birds and seasonal flowers, moonlit hayfields, winter snow-storms, brooks, forest and mountain, orchards drifted deep with falling petals, birches twined with clambering wild grape vines, and leaves in the pasture spring.

Often these descriptions appear in pure lyrics, but they are also found as the background or setting of many a narrative poem: an instance of the former being the well-known Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,<sup>1</sup> and of the latter, The Black Cottage.<sup>2</sup>

Every one of his long narrative poems is set against a New England country landscape, many of them farm-houses or their surrounding dooryards or pastures. Others take us into the more remote spruce woods, to the spring on the mountain-top, or to the maple sugar camp. And everywhere in this country background we find its animal life depicted, as well as that of its human inhabitants: the wild life, timid or fearless, or mountain and forest, like the rabbit, deer, and bear; the song-birds of meadow and woodland, from the dainty humming-bird to the crow; the insect life of ant, bee, and wasp; and the home-loving animals of the farm,--the cats and dogs, hens and chickens, cows and horses.

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost p. 275

2 Ibid: p. 74



have found to be filled with beautiful descriptions of  
slender birds and seasonal flowers, meadows, and  
winter scenes, brooks, forest and mountains, orchards  
filled with wild fruit, and the garden with  
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Other fine descriptive poems in pure English, but  
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land, from the dainty warbler to the crow; the insect  
life of ant, bee, and wasp; and the home-loving animals  
of the farm,--the cat and dog, horse and chicken, cow  
and horse.

People

And what of his people, the natives of his dramatic monologues, his New Hampshire and Vermont neighbors? He draws them as he has seen them on their farms or in the small towns, perhaps more often the types that are mentally unsound and the lonely or weak, but he also includes the sane and sensible Yankee, shrewd or whimsical in his outlook upon life, very much as the poet himself might be, lacking the artistic perception or genius that makes him one. Frost takes these people as he finds them, the products of their environment; and if they are limited in their life and their views, he shows the reason for it. Perhaps he over-emphasizes the limitations in the kind of characters he chooses to write about, but they are of the rural New England of today as he sees them, and hence his work has a value in giving us a true picture of a time. If it is a decadent New England, as has been suggested, we can perhaps arrive at some of the reasons for this situation, and look ahead to a time when greater opportunities for intercourse and better educational advantages, improvements in farm and household conveniences may avert the loneliness and mental perversion of these rural people.

Occupations

We have also seen that the poet was familiar with all types of hardy, out-door work on



People

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of these rural people.

Occupations

We have also seen that the real was familiar  
with all types of hard, out-door work on

the farm and in the woods, and that he had engaged at first hand in all that goes to making one's living by farming. Most of these occupations are discussed at some length in his poems, from spring plowing and fall harvesting to cutting and sawing wood and mending a stone wall. We hear the whetting of his scythe, the drone of his buzz-saw; we see him dropping the seed, picking his apple crop, raking the falling leaves of autumn; and we learn again with him the dignity of labor...."the fact is the sweetest dream<sup>1</sup> that labor knows."

New England  
Expressions

As for his use of English speech, Frost employs in his dramatic monologues a conversational style with little or no dialect, but with frequent colloquial expressions that give it a typical New England country flavor. This style allows him to be understood wherever English is spoken, but at the same time adds a certain pungency and local color to his poems,-- gives them "that talk-flavored tone" which Untermeyer refers to.<sup>2</sup> The great charm of these longer narrative poems must ever lie partly, at least, in the simple and native conversational manner in which they are told.

Universality  
of Appeal

No one who loves New England scenes and people of either a generation ago

1 Collected Poems by Robert Frost p.25

2 Modern American Poetry by Louis Untermeyer p. 257



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hand in all that goes to making one's living by farming.  
Most of these occupations are discussed at some length in  
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ting and sawing wood and mending a stone wall. We learn  
the shelling of his soybeans, the sowing of his buckwheat;  
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New England  
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Universality  
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No one who loves New England scenes  
and people of either a generation ago

or of today could fail to enjoy Frost's poetry or to realize what he has done to add beauty and dignity to the literature of this part of our country. Whatever the New England of the future may be, may it never lose the shrewd common sense, simplicity, whimsicality, neighborliness and human sympathy which are outstanding characteristics of Frost's poetry, and of which he is himself so good an exponent.

In spite of what some of the critics have said to the contrary, however, the writer finds that Frost's characters have a universal appeal, that they are very human,--not altogether different people from those to be found in any other part of the United States. And it is because of this universal appeal as well as of the local, that his work seems to have a chance of living, not only as a great tribute to the New England that he loves so passionately, but for the enjoyment of the world of literature at large.



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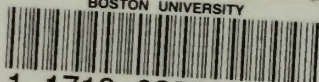
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